

A GAY CHARMER

A STORY FOR GIRLS.

BY

L.T. MEADE.



ILLUSTRATED BY W.H.C. GROOME, R.B.A.



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Southend-on-Sea

A GAY CHARMER



A Gay Charmer

A STORY FOR GIRLS

BY

L. T. MEADE

AUTHOR OF 'GIRLS OF THE FOREST,' 'SEVEN MAIDS,' 'THE ODDS AND THE EVENS,'
'THE REBEL OF THE SCHOOL,' ETC.

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS BY

W. H. C. GROOME, R.B.A.

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A GAY CHARMER.

CHAPTER I.

SHIRLEY.



IT was the end of a long, hot July day. Julia Cairns, aged fifteen, was waiting in the garden in her prim gray dress. Her hair was neatly parted, and hung in two thick plaits down her back. Her little straw hat was trimmed with a simple band of white ribbon. She stood by a great rose-bush, which was partly covered with blossom and partly surrounded by the falling leaves of a past glory.

Julia was standing erect in a listening attitude. She was a quiet-looking girl, with a serene expression of face which those children wear who have never been out in the world. Julia had been most properly brought up from her earliest days. She was the only child of old-fashioned people. She had come to her parents somewhat late in their lives, and had been regarded as a special treasure, but on no account one to be spoilt. She was brought up

strictly, and was taught to believe the world to be a very bad place, and to regard the wild Yorkshire moors and the little town of Tynewood as all of it which it was necessary for her to know.

Her home was called The Grange, and Mr and Mrs Cairns of The Grange were amongst the most respected people in the neighbourhood. The clergyman and the Squire might have been preferred before them, but they certainly came next. Julia was accustomed to raising her meek little head and looking with a certain dainty pride at the girls whose parents liked gay clothing and fun and frivolity and loud laughter and merry speeches. Julia certainly never envied those girls. She liked the stillness of her life; she enjoyed the absolute regularity of her duties. Early to bed and early to rise was undoubtedly good for health; meals eaten with regularity further conduced to that agreeable state of being. Lessons properly learnt, with all one's might and at certain hours, were essential to a young lady. A due knowledge of music—on no account a professional knowledge—was also well worth acquiring. Water-colour drawing and little, fine pencil sketches were quite to her mind. Her French was the French of an English girl who lives at home. Her German was not much better. But her knowledge of history was excellent, and up to the present she had never read a novel in her life.

Such was the fifteen-year-old maiden who was waiting on the eve of a discovery. She had not the slightest idea that anything very remarkable was going to happen, and that she was going to be taken morally right off her feet and plunged into

such abysses of mischief, such oceans of mirth, such rollicking, such racing, such daring fun and worldliness, that she would never know herself again.

‘Julia!’ cried her mother; and Julia ran towards her parent.

Mrs Cairns, dressed in a shawl and poke-bonnet, was leaning on her husband’s arm. They were both slowly perambulating up and down a smooth, sunny walk. They had lived in India in their youth, and still felt the cold of our northern climes. Mrs Cairns drew her shawl more tightly round her as Julia came up.

‘The dew is falling, Julia; you had better go into the house and get your jacket.’

‘I am very hot, mamma.’

‘Still, my dear, the dew is falling, and I should prefer you to wear your jacket.’

‘Very well, mamma.’

‘We are sending the brougham to meet Shirley Kendal,’ said Mr Cairns, glancing at his daughter.

‘I thought perhaps’——

‘Oh yes, papa, I should like it awfully!’

‘Don’t say “awfully,” my dear,’ said her mother.

‘It is such a misplaced term! Say, “I should like it very much.”’

‘I should like it very much, mamma,’ said Julia.

‘Well then, you shall go.’

‘What shall I say when I get to the station?’

‘Just wait in the brougham. Don’t on any account get out. If your father was not suffering from a touch of rheumatism in the shoulder he would go with you. As it is, it is not to be thought of.’

'My shoulder is very stiff indeed, Julie,' said her father in an apologetic tone.

'Dear papa!' murmured the girl.

'I will rub it well for you to-night, Stephen,' said his wife.

He smiled at wife and daughter, and looked as if he wished to continue his walk.

'You will wait, remember,' said the mother, '*in* the brougham until the girl appears. I suppose, as she is coming all the way from Paris by herself, she will be able to ask a porter if a carriage from The Grange is waiting for her.'

'What will she look like, mamma? How am I to know her?'

'I can't tell you; I have not a description of her appearance.'

'Yes, my dear,' interrupted Mr Cairns; 'we were told that Shirley was extremely pretty.'

'I do think it is the height of affectation to give her that name,' said Mrs Cairns; 'copying poor Currer Bell. I objected to the name when it appeared in her book, and now to give it to an ordinary, commonplace girl of the present generation! I only hope she won't resemble that young lady in any other particulars.'

'Poor Kendal wrote to me about that before he died,' said Mr Cairns. 'He said that Shirley's mother admired Charlotte Brontë's heroine so much that they were determined to give the name to their daughter.'

Mrs Cairns gave an indignant sniff.

Julia looked at her mother and said gently, 'Who was Shirley?'

‘The name of a girl in a book, dear—a book which, notwithstanding all its cleverness, I hope you will never read. Ah! there is the brougham. Put on your jacket and go, Julia dear; you will just be in time.’

Julia gave that gentle little inclination of the head which she was expected to bestow upon her parents whenever she left them. She then walked soberly down the broad gravel path, reached the drive, walked up to the hall door, and telling a servant to fetch her jacket, put it on and then stepped into the brougham.

‘To the station, Jones,’ she said to the coachman.

The man drove off obediently, and Julia sank against the snugly padded seat and thought about things. She wondered what the girl would be like. She wondered how it felt to know that one was very pretty. She certainly was not pretty, although her mother had told her that she was lady-like. Her mother had said, ‘It is very, very much better to be lady-like than pretty, and I am thankful to say that you look a lady.’ Julia’s idea, therefore, was that a pretty girl could not look like a lady.

‘Unlady-like, and with an outlandish name!’ she said to herself. ‘Mother said once that she hoped I would improve her. I am sure I shall try. But at least of one thing I am resolved: I will not yield to her, or allow her to think even for a single moment that wrong is right and right wrong. She is not coming here to teach me; I shall teach her. It is very kind of father and mother to take her up. I wonder if she is poor. I shall be glad if she is, for I shall be able to be nice to her. I can

give her some of my old clothes—that is, if they fit her. Oh! I forgot; she is sixteen. She may be taller than I am. I hope she isn't. Ah! there's the train; we're rather late. Shall I hurry Jones, or shall I let him take his own way? Perhaps I'd better not hurry him; the horses may take fright. How awful it would be to be the heroine of a carriage accident! Well, our horses are pretty well seasoned. Now then, here we are!

The train had puffed into the little wayside station. It stayed there for a couple of minutes, and then puffed out again. Julia sat with her hands tightly folded in her lap. She longed to spring from the carriage, to rush up the steps and on to the platform; but that would not be lady-like. She wished her heart would not beat dreadfully fast; that was not lady-like either. She squeezed her hands together a little tighter. The passengers who had come by the train made their appearance. There was a certain Mrs Sowerby who lived in the town, a pompous sort of person, who looked at Julia, and very slightly inclined her head. Then came the clergyman, Mr Marshall. Julia never approved of Mr Marshall; she thought him so untidy. He had a child now clinging on to each hand, but when he saw Julia he stopped and came up to the carriage.

'How do you do?' he said. 'Are your father and mother quite well?'

'Pretty well, thank you,' said Julia; but then she added, correcting herself, 'I forgot; papa has a touch of rheumatism in the shoulder.'

'I must come round and see him to-morrow,' said

Mr Marshall. 'By the way, Miss Julia, a young lady has arrived by this train. She has brought a lot of luggage. She inquired if a carriage from your place had come. You are expecting some one, are you not?'

'Yes,' said Julia in her calmest voice; 'Shirley Kendal.'

'Then I think this is she.—Miss Kendal, I have found your carriage.'

The clergyman left the two children grimacing on the path, and going up to a tall, slender girl, offered to take one of the many parcels which she carried.

'No, thank you,' answered a bright voice. 'Oh! this is the carriage.—Porter, perhaps the coachman can manage one small trunk; and perhaps a cart can come for the rest.—Oh! are you—is it possible that you are Miss Cairns?'

The gay voice accosted Julia. Julia felt herself colouring; it was as though a full, brilliant, delicious sun had streamed all over her. The girl was all life; her very voice spoke vivacity. She had quantities of hair, but, to Julia's horror, she saw that it was red hair—red of that peculiar tint which glows when the light passes through it. It was all wavy and curly, and the face beneath this brilliant framework was delicately fair, and the eyes brown. The girl had a lovely mouth and snow-white teeth, each little feature was neat and well chiselled, and the brow above the eyes was broad and intelligent. The eyes themselves were full at the same time of mischief and sweetness. Notwithstanding her hair, it was evident that the girl was beautiful. But Julia, brought up to

abhor red hair, gave a quick, puzzled sigh and said to herself, 'With such a shocking colour in her hair she must be considered plain.'

'How d'you do?' said Shirley. 'I'm so glad to see you! Awfully kind of you to come! But how about my luggage? I have seven trunks—yes, I have, really—all my possessions—full of such delicious things!—frocks, mantles, sashes, laces, blouses, and hats; and'——

'Perhaps I had better wish you good-day,' said the clergyman. His face was full of amusement.

Julia looked gravely at her companion.

'I don't think you will need all those things with us,' she said, looking full at the new-comer.

'Good gracious, my dear! I can't get rid of them. I have them, and they must stay. And I rather think I shall want them, for it is my pleasure to be well dressed. But can the teeniest trunk be put opposite the coachman, and will you send for the others to-morrow?'

'I'll ask papa,' said Julia. 'Certainly only one trunk can come on the box. And will you get in, please? It isn't good for the horses to be kept standing.'

The girl flashed round and made a remark to the porter. The porter said, 'Yes, miss.'

'I'll be with you in a minute,' she said, and she darted back into the station.

Julia's heart went on beating fast.

'Mamma won't like her,' she thought, nodding her head sagaciously. 'And I don't suppose papa will. And it's very unsuitable to have seven boxes full of clothes. Why, she might almost start a shop!

And she's not pretty at all. Such terrible hair! I am sure we shall have trouble with her. Dear, dear, what a pity she has come! It will make papa's rheumatism worse, and mamma will suffer from her indigestion. Oh, here she comes!

'It's all right now,' said Shirley; 'the porter will take care of my trunks until the morning. They are confided to the cloak-room.—Thank you, porter.'

She slipped half-a-crown into the delighted man's hand, and then hopped into the carriage.

'Oh, my parrot!' she cried. 'Good gracious! I had forgotten. Do you mind having him in the carriage with us?'

'I suppose—I must.'

'Good gracious, dear, of course you must! The poor thing can't be injured. He is in quite a small cage at present. The large one comes to-morrow with the rest of the luggage. And my Persian cat; she's in this basket. She has three kittens. She is such a beauty! You don't mind a cat and kittens, do you?'

'I don't know. We don't have many animals at The Grange.'

'And my curly, fuzzy, darling duck of a Spitz—here you are, my sweet! His name is Mops. You don't mind Mops, do you, coming in with us?'

Julia had no time to reply, for the parrot, the cat and kittens in the basket, and Mops in the young lady's arms were all crowded into that correct, proper brougham, and at last they started on their way.

Shirley took some time to arrange herself, to

soothe the parrot, to say 'Hush, hush!' to the cries of the cats, and to keep a firm little hand over Mops's excited face. At last they were fairly on their way home.

'Well, here I am!' she said. 'What do you think of me? And what is your name?'

'My name is Julia—Julia Cairns.'

'Oh, you are the precious only daughter! Do you mind my calling you Pod? It is so much easier.'

'I don't understand.'

'Well, it's quite easy. P, precious; O, only; D, daughter—P-o-d, Pod.'

Julia made up her mind that Shirley was a most objectionable person.

'My name is Julia,' she said, 'and I would much rather be called that.'

'Oh, I say, what lovely country! Do you mind having the window right down? Why should we be mewed up in this little box?'

'It's the brougham,' said Julia more stiffly than ever; 'and mamma doesn't wish me to sit in a draught.'

'Well, keep up the window if you like. How far is it to your home?'

'Two miles and a half.'

'Can you see it? Can you direct me to it?'

'I don't know. Oh yes, but we are in the carriage; we shall soon be home.'

'But, my dear good soul, I really cannot stand this. I must get out and walk. If there's a short cut, so much the better. You will get there first, and I will follow.'

'But your animals?'

‘Mops shall come with me, and you shall look after the kittens and the parrot. Or won’t you come too?’

‘But the dew is falling,’ said Julia. ‘Mamma never allows me to be out long when the dew falls.’

She squeezed her little shoulders together and drew her coat more tightly round her.

Shirley poked her head out of the window.

‘Coachman!’ she called.

‘His name is Jones,’ said Julia.

‘Jones—I say, Jones!’

Shirley broke into a whistle.

The proper Jones, who had lived in that proper household for nearly twenty years, turned in amazement.

‘I say, Jones, pull up by the roadside; I’m getting out.’

Julia compressed her small mouth until it was almost invisible.

‘Is that the house up there,’ said Shirley—‘that brown, snug house in that poky little valley? Is that your home? I’ll get to it in time. I shall cut across those fields.’

‘But please, Shirley, really they’re wet with dew.’

‘I’m afraid the dew never yet frightened me,’ said Shirley. ‘Good-bye for the present, Julia. So sorry I couldn’t stand that close carriage! I’ll be at home probably before you are.’

Like a flash she was out of the carriage and the door was shut.

‘Drive on, Jones,’ said the lively young lady.—‘Mops, my angel!’

She climbed the hedge and was in the next field in a moment. Mops, now perfectly frantic with delight, was barking at her feet.

The coachman moved slowly on. Julia's face was grave with apprehension. How wicked that horrible parrot looked! If she put her hand anywhere within an inch of the cage he might peck her finger. And those detestable cats—three kittens and one cat—all coming without any permission to live at The Grange!

'I'd much better give them in charge to the people at the lodge,' thought Julia. 'Yes, that's a very good idea; and the parrot too. Shirley really is rather too much—rather unmanageable. What a time mamma and papa will have with her!'

CHAPTER II.

A GIRL OF PARTS.



JULIA desired the coachman to draw up at the lodge. Mrs Hughes, the good-natured gardener's wife, came out in a hurry.

'Please, Mrs Hughes,' said Julia, 'I want you to take care of this parrot.'

'Oh lor', miss, will he bite?'

'I don't know, Mrs Hughes. The young lady who has just come here brought him. We'll tell you what is to be done with him in the morning. Yes, I see he has seed in his trough. Give him some water.'

'I simply daren't, miss; I'm that scared of parrots!'

'Well, perhaps your husband will. Don't let him get injured. And here's a basket with a Persian cat and three kittens; will you look after them too?'

'I'll do my best, Miss Cairns.'

'Thank you; I'm sure you will. Please tell Jones to drive on to the house.'

The brougham went slowly up the winding avenue. Julia pressed her face against the pane of glass. She had decided, now that evening was really coming on, to shut both windows. She saw, however, as she approached the house, a sight which

caused her to start. This was no less than her father and mother still out, with the dew falling heavily, and a red-haired girl walking between them. The red-haired girl had a somewhat swinging, dancing step, and her brilliant head was turned alternately to right and left as she chattered in gay, light tones to her host and hostess.

Julia's heart began to beat fast again. 'Things are getting absolutely unaccountable,' she said to herself.

Nobody noticed as the brougham drove up to the front porch; for the first time her arrival was unnoted. She had to open the carriage door herself, for even the footman was not in his accustomed place on the steps.

'Take the horses round to the stables, Jones,' she said; 'and desire some one to bring Miss Kendal's trunk into the house.—I suppose I had better go and meet them,' she thought. 'It really is almost wicked of father to be out in this heavy dew.' Then she went slowly towards her father and mother.

Shirley's conversation was so enticing that neither parent saw Julia. But Shirley herself did. She uttered a shout and ran towards her.

'Oh, you have come, Julia!' she said. 'And where is my parrot—where's Mordecai? You mustn't leave him anywhere on the ground, for he is rather a fierce bird and would peck your cats to bits. And where's my precious Persian cat and her family?'

Julia pushed past Shirley. She really felt indignant.

‘In a minute or two,’ she said.—‘Father darling, is this good for your rheumatic shoulder?’

‘I’d forgotten it, my child,’ said her father.

‘Really, Stephen,’ said his wife, ‘so had I. How very imprudent of us both! Come in at once.—Shirley dear, now that Julia has returned, we will leave you in her care.—Julia, my darling, take your cousin up to her room, and see that she has everything she can possibly want. Supper will be ready at nine o’clock. It is past eight now.’

Mrs Cairns slipped her hand through her husband’s arm, and they went into the house. Shirley looked full at Julia.

‘Well,’ she said, ‘here I am! Are you glad to see me, little coz?—little coz all in gray, with the grave, grave face and the—— Oh, my dear, you are so like a little Quakeress! I hope I’ll soon knock all that out of you. Thank goodness, Cousin Shirley, with her caprices and her daring ways, her fun and her mischief, has arrived! You’d have sunk into an early grave, little coz, if I hadn’t looked you up.’

‘I don’t understand you,’ said Julia. Then she added, the colour flushing into her cheeks, and a sense of anger which had never visited her before filling her heart: ‘I don’t like your ways, and I don’t pretend to. I like the quiet, lady-like ways that we follow in this house far better. I don’t know who has brought you up, nor anything about you, except that you are my cousin, and that you are to obey father and mother, and live with us for a year. That’s all I know. As to your pets, you must first of all ask my parents’ leave before

the parrot is brought here, and the cat with the kittens.'

'I say,' cried Shirley, 'what have you done with them?'

'I've left them in good keeping at the lodge.'

'Wherever is the lodge?'

'About half a mile away from here.'

'Well, I'll only pray that my temper won't break forth. It can be pretty sharp when I like. So that's the way you welcome a cousin from over the seas, is it? We'll soon change that.'

She rushed away from Julia, who stood perfectly still on the gravel sweep. Julia was no longer cold; she was hot with excitement. She wondered if her cousin would go off daringly to the lodge and return with her treasures, or if she would go into the house.

Shirley stood still for a moment. Her whole body—the very way she held her head—showed that she was on fire with something within. She darted through the open door and into the primly kept house.

'I say, Aunt Charity! Aunt Charity!—Uncle Stephen! Uncle Stephen!'

The gay, full tones seemed to waken echoes that had never been raised before in that house. Mrs Cairns came out of her room on to the landing.

'Who is calling? What is the matter?' she asked.

'It's I, Aunt Charity—your affectionate niece Shirley. Are you going to allow my Mordecai—my darling—to stay at the lodge all night? Or am I to bring him straight away home? I want

my Mordi at home. He's very, very dear to me. Julia left him at the lodge without your permission, but he sha'n't come here without your permission. May he come? That's all.'

A voice within Mrs Cairns's room said something. Mrs Cairns came to the banisters and looked over.

'Yes, Shirley, your uncle says you may have Mordecai; only he had better stay in your room to-night.'

'That's all right. I'd blow Uncle Stephen a kiss if it would reach him. And now my kitty-cat—my sweet darling; she's a silver-gray Persian, and she has the three most fascinating kittens you ever saw in all your life. Their names are Pop, Drop, and Clover. May I bring them here? They may get lost, and they're worth a lot of money.'

'Yes, dear—certainly, dear,' said Mrs Cairns.

Shirley danced out again on to the gravel sweep.

'Come along, Julia; let's go to the lodge and get our treasures,' cried Shirley.

'I don't want to,' said Julia. 'Why should you upset the house with your—your ways?'

'Oh, just as you please!' said Shirley, giving her a little push. 'You can go into the house and get primly ready for the next prim meal, but I'm off to rescue my darlings.'

Julia did not say any more. Shirley darted up the avenue, and Julia watched her out of sight.

'I don't think I can stand this,' she said to herself, and went slowly within doors.

The objectionable girl was far away; the house

looked still and orderly as of old. Julia said to herself once again, 'I don't think I can stand this.'

But then she reflected that it was her place to show patience. It was extraordinary the way her father and mother seemed to be already under the new girl's influence. But of course it could not possibly last. The girl must bend to Julia's yoke. Her father and mother would soon know how absurdly silly they were in encouraging such impish ways.

Julia went up to her room. Her maid Heron was waiting as usual to attend on her. Heron was to look after Shirley Kendal as well.

'What dress will you put on to-night, miss? And you are late; I shall not be able to replait your hair.'

'Oh, that doesn't matter,' said Julia. 'Just smooth it in front. I'll wear my pale-gray frock. No sash, please; I hate—— I mean, Heron, I shall dislike dress more than ever now.'

Heron made no response. Julia was as a rule very uncommunicative, and Heron, who had served her since she was a little child, had more or less the same ideas of life.

By-and-by, when the little girl was arrayed in the quietest of evening apparel, she turned to Heron.

'Have you seen the visitor yet?'

'No, miss; but Jones says she's rather a flighty young lady. Very beautiful, though.'

'Oh, he thinks her beautiful? I don't. Why Heron, she has hideous red hair, just like a lot of

carrots. You couldn't admire any one with red hair.'

'Me, miss?' said Heron. 'I have a perfect horror of red hair.'

'And so have I,' replied Julia, feeling soothed for a minute. 'Heron,' she continued, 'I don't wish to complain, but I'm afraid both you and I will have great need for patience now that this girl has come to live here. She must have been brought up very badly, for she really hasn't the slightest idea how to control herself. I never knew any one so devoid of all the commonest ideas of politeness. And her dress is so *outré*; and her appearance just the same. And she—she has brought seven trunks—would you believe it?—all full of the most inappropriate clothes. I asked her if she meant to start a shop.'

'Oh, did you, Miss Julia? Then I'm sure, miss, it was rather spirited of you.'

'Yes; I really think it was. I can't imagine what she can mean by burdening the house with all that useless finery. But that isn't the worst, Heron: there's a dog.'

'A pretty little black Spitz, bless his heart!' said Heron.

'Why, Heron, I thought you hated dogs.'

'Once I had a dog of that sort of my very own,' said Heron. 'He died, poor wee thing! I feel mournful at heart still. I couldn't mind a Spitz—a thoroughbred Spitz—the very least, miss.'

'Well, you must keep him out of my way, for I hate what are called pets. But that isn't all. There's a wicked, demonish parrot.'

‘Oh miss, a parrot?’

‘Yes; and a cat with three kittens.’

Heron suppressed a smile.

‘I don’t suppose that sort of thing will be long allowed here,’ she said. ‘But the supper-gong has gone, miss; perhaps you had better go downstairs.’

Julia thought that she had. It would never do to neglect any of the usual polite observances on the first night of Shirley’s visit. She tripped downstairs in her usual gentle way and went into the drawing-room.

The drawing-room at The Grange was a very long, somewhat low room. It was furnished after a bygone fashion with huge, unwieldy pieces of early Victorian furniture. The windows were square bays, and, as they came down to the ground, would have presented a charming view of gardens and lawns were the time day; but the curtains were drawn and the lamps lit. The lamps were not many, and the curtains were of a dark texture, so that the room had a half-lit and decidedly dull effect. There were quantities of tables and chairs and two large centre-tables in the room. The chairs were most of them hard and old-fashioned. Easy-chairs and soft living were by no means the fashion in The Grange drawing-room.

Julia stood for a minute in the room. She expected her father and mother to be waiting for her. They always did wait, even if she were a little behind her time. But they were not in the room. She felt annoyed. Was Shirley already upsetting the whole house?

Just then a sound broke on her ears. It was

the sound made by a screaming parrot, and in the midst of the screams of the parrot intermingled the barks of the small dog and the mewling of several cats. Steps were heard in the stone hall outside. Julia was impelled to find her way to the drawing-room door. She opened it an inch or two, and saw Shirley, very red in the face, dragging her pets upstairs. A minute or two afterwards Mr and Mrs Cairns came into the drawing-room.

Mr Cairns offered one arm to his wife and the other to Julia, after immemorial fashion, and they went into the dining-room. A cold supper of a somewhat meagre character was there waiting for them. Two large silver candelabra were the only lights allowed in the dark and lofty room. Julia sat down at one side of the table. A place had been laid for her cousin exactly opposite.

The meal had proceeded almost in silence for about ten minutes when the door opened softly and a girl in a pale-blue muslin dress—a dress all flounces and lace—with a wealth of red hair tumbling about her neck and shoulders, and her eyes sparkling with fun, entered the room, accompanied by Mops.

‘Oh, Aunt Charity, I am so sorry!—Uncle Stephen, please forgive me.—Julia, your pardon.—Is this my seat, aunt? Thank you so much! May Mops sit at my feet?—Mops, be quiet; not a word! Die, sir—die for your country. Stay in a dying condition. There, now—there you are.’

Mops, obedient to the word of command, went on his side, laid his head flat down, and fixed

bright, expectant eyes on Shirley. Both Mr and Mrs Cairns looked with keen interest at this performance. Mr Cairns began to laugh.

‘Really,’ he said, ‘this is most amusing. How long will he stay in that uncomfortable position?’

‘Until I say the word; and I am not going to at present, for he has been rather naughty upstairs, barking at my kittywicks when I desired him to be quiet.’

‘I hope your animals are comfortably established for the night, Shirley,’ said her aunt as she handed her a plate of cold lamb.

‘Oh yes, aunty; I think they’ll do nicely. I’ve put them into that empty closet just outside my door. You must come up and see them after supper. I wish you would.’

‘I shall be pleased to, dear. I haven’t seen a blue Persian for a long time.’

‘Ah! when you see my Flopsy you’ll just wish that the darling belonged to you. She is a treasure. And as to Pop and Drop and Clover, they’re the most winsome dears that ever drew breath.’

All this time Julia was absolutely silent.

‘Julia, you do not eat,’ said her mother.

‘I’m not hungry, thank you, mother,’ replied Julia.

‘I hope, darling, you didn’t get a chill coming home.’

‘I can vouch for that,’ interrupted Shirley, ‘for when I left the carriage I saw her shut up the other window. But do you know,’ she added, fixing her eyes on her cousin’s sulky face, ‘that sort of thing makes you take cold. It does, really, Aunt

Charity. Do you keep your window open at night? You ought to.—I heard some one say that you had twinges of rheumatism, Uncle Stephen. Nothing is so good for that as plenty of fresh air. Oh, I know! I once spent a week with a dear, darling creature who does massage, and she told me a lot about it, and I learnt a little. She said fresh air and massage would cure anything. So, now, who is going in for a thorough cure? For fresh air can be easily had, and I will do the massage.'

'Hadn't you better eat your supper?' said Julia.

'I will.'

Shirley bent over her plate. She finished her first helping of lamb and asked for more. She demanded salad; she demanded bread-and-butter. When the sweet part of the entertainment came on she asked three times for raspberry-tart. Finally she wound up her repast with two custards and a plate of strawberries.

'Now I shall do,' she said. 'I'm sorry I kept you waiting, but really I was hungry. Who's coming to see my kittywicks?—Are you, Uncle Stephen?'

'Father never goes upstairs at this hour; he finds it much too fatiguing,' said Julia.

'But mayn't he answer for himself, Julia?—Will you, Uncle Stephen?'

'What do you say, my dear?' said Mr Cairns, looking at his wife.

'I don't see why we shouldn't all go up and see the kittens,' said Mrs Cairns. 'Come, Julia darling, give me your arm.'

‘I don’t want to see them, mother; I must get on with my needlework. You know it’s for a charity, and I have to give in six dusters on Wednesday next.’

‘Good gracious!’ cried Shirley. ‘Come along, uncle; come along, aunty. Now then!’

Julia disappeared into the drawing-room. She shut the door quietly, but she had scarcely done so before she stamped violently inside the room. She clenched her hands together and tried to repress the furious anger which filled her.

‘I can’t and won’t stand this!’ she said to herself. ‘What has come to father and mother? I never would dare to ask them to go upstairs on my account after supper, and yet that girl—that stranger—she actually makes them do what she likes. And father out so late to-night! He, who is so very rheumatic! He’ll be in bed with rheumatic fever to-morrow. Oh, what a terrible life I’m going to have!’

Julia paced rapidly up and down the room. By-and-by, when her parents’ steps were heard, she rushed to her place under the lamp, took up her sewing, and began to hem vigorously. When Mr and Mrs Cairns opened the drawing-room door they noticed her demure little figure sitting under the lamp. The bright light fell on the smooth brown head, and though there was anger in the little heart, it did not show itself.

‘My sweet, industrious, good child,’ said Mrs Cairns. She went up to Julia and kissed her.

A lump came into Julia’s throat. She longed to fling her arms round her mother’s neck, and to

say, 'I am miserable. Are you ever going to love me any more?' But she suppressed herself.

Shirley came up with vigorous steps.

'What are you making, Julia? Oh, I see—dusters. Are they dusters?'

'Yes; you can see for yourself.'

'So they are. And for a charity?'

'Yes.'

'You must be just awfully good.—Aunt Charity, do you know'——

'What, dear?'

'I'm not a bit good. I wouldn't hem a duster if you were to pay me. Aren't you rather frightened to have me here?'

'I hope you will be very happy here, Shirley.'

'Well, the fact is, I just adore you and Uncle Stephen; and I'd love Julia if she'd let me. Isn't this room rather dark? Wouldn't you like that lamp over there to be lit—that one near the big piano?'

'We never have that lamp lit unless we have company,' said Julia, whose eyes flashed fire with indignation.

'Oh! Perhaps I might be counted company just for the first night,' said the irrepressible Shirley.

'Ring the bell, dear,' said Mrs Cairns to Julia—'that bell close to you.'

Julia, most unwillingly, was obliged to comply. The footman appeared.

'Robert, light the lamp by the piano.'

Robert did what he was required.

'Ah! that's much, much better,' said Shirley.

'Now, what can I do to amuse you? Would you like me to sing?'

‘But can you sing?’ said Mrs Cairns. ‘Surely not yet; you must be too young.’

‘I’m sixteen, and I love singing. I have sung always since I can remember. I’ll sing some Irish ditties. Don’t you love Ireland? I do.’

‘I have never been there,’ said Mrs Cairns in a somewhat stiff voice.

‘Ah! then you have something to live for. I’d like to sing you a true Irish ballad.’

Mr Cairns, with an amused look on his face, approached the piano. Shirley seated herself, played a brilliant prelude, and then broke into a gay lilt with a dancing measure:

‘As beautiful Kitty one morning was tripping
With a pitcher of milk for the fair of Coleraine,
When she saw me she stumbled, the pitcher down tumbled,
And all the sweet butter-milk watered the plain.
“Oh, what shall I do now? ’Twas looking at you now!
I’m sure such a pitcher I’ll ne’er see again.
’Twas the pride of my dairy. Oh, Barney M’Cleary,
You’re sent as a plague to the girls of Coleraine.”

‘I sat down beside her, and gently did chide her
That such a misfortune should give her such pain;
A kiss then I gave her, and before I did lave her
She vowed for such pleasure she’d break it again.
’Twas the haymaking season—I can’t tell the reason—
Misfortunes will never come single, ’tis plain!
For very soon after poor Kitty’s disaster
There wasn’t a pitcher found whole in Coleraine.’

Shirley swung herself round on the music-stool.

‘Don’t you see the fun?’ she said, her eyes dancing, her white teeth gleaming.

‘I’m afraid I don’t,’ said Julia. ‘I think it’s horrid—not nice at all. Is there any point to it?’

'Is there any point to it, Uncle Stephen?' cried Shirley. 'Is there any point to it?'

The old gentleman smiled. Shirley once more attacked her music and sang a part of 'The Wearin' o' the Green.' Then she sprang to her feet.

'After all, I believe I am tired,' she said. 'May I go to bed? I want to be up at cock-crow to-morrow morning. I want to explore and explore—dive here and dart there—to see all the beautiful life that is spread out before me.'

'But will it indeed be a beautiful life to you, Shirley?' said Mrs Cairns at that moment.

'That remains in your hands, aunty—and in yours, Uncle Stephen—and in yours, Julia,' said Shirley in a slightly saddened voice. 'I don't know,' she continued after a pause, 'whether it would be possible to make me feel very dull and very discontented. I never have been yet—never; but of course there's no saying. I don't want to probe to the depths of utter dullness; such a life would not suit me.'

The tears were still in her eyes. They made her look more brilliant, more dazzling, than ever. They added a touch of pathos to the mocking, fascinating face.

The next minute she had kissed both Mr and Mrs Cairns, had bestowed a swift peck on the back of Julia's head, and had left the room.

Julia threw down her work and looked at her father and mother.

'Well!' she exclaimed. 'Do you like this? Do you like her? Oh, I must speak out just for

once! Is she indeed the sort of girl you wish me to imitate?’

‘Come here, Julia,’ said her father.

He had seated himself in a prim chair not far from the piano. As Julia spoke he looked at the instrument with a sort of lingering regret.

‘That child has the most lovely voice,’ he said. ‘When she is trained she will sing so as to fascinate every one.’

‘Father,’ said Julia in a stifled tone, ‘you called me, and I am here.’

‘My little Julia, so you are. Sit on this low chair near to me.’

Julia drew the chair forward. She took her father’s hand and fondled it between both her own. The discontent had left her face like magic; for a time it was a softened and gentle look that fixed itself on Mr Cairns’s face.

‘Father dear—mother dear—I was so happy! Must she come and destroy everything?’

‘Yes, Julie,’ said her father very gravely; ‘she has come, and she must stay; and while she is here she must be made happy.’

‘I know,’ said Julia. ‘I don’t wish to be unkind, but need she really, really upset everything—all the ways of our placid life—all our dear old-fashioned ways? She is so new and so worldly!’

‘You must face the truth, Julia,’ said her father. ‘Your cousin is new to you; her ways surprise you; you don’t yet recognise that she is a very charming young creature. She is, I am certain, amiable. She has a way with her which attracts affection. She will be loved wherever she goes.’

She is willing to love you; don't let the demon of jealousy get into your heart so as to put a cloud between you and her. She has come, and she must stay. She is my dear sister's only child—my dead sister. I will welcome her, and so must you. Understand, it is my wish.'

'And, Julia darling,' said her mother, 'understand one thing also—that because we are kind and loving to Shirley, that cannot make us love you the less.'

'As you love her, so we will love you more,' said her father. 'And now go to bed, darling. Sleep sound; congratulate yourself on having that charming cousin in the house with you. No doubt things will change, for it is the immemorial law of life that the old order giveth place to the new. This very change may be for your benefit.'

'No, no,' said Julia, suddenly bursting into tears. 'That is too much. All the teaching of all my life cannot be upset by one dreadful girl. Yes, she is a dreadful girl. She has thrown a glamour over you, mother—and over you, father.'

'That is a very disrespectful way of speaking, Julia. I have never heard you address your parents in such a manner before,' said Mr Cairns in a voice of great annoyance.

'Then I owe that to her too. Yes, I will try to be civil; but I hate her, so there! Good-night. I am a very miserable girl.'

CHAPTER III.

A BAD YOUNG THING.



HERON was waiting to help Julia to get into bed. Heron always brushed the little girl's long, thick, mouse-coloured hair for ten minutes every evening. Julia sat down to await the accustomed operation. Heron brushed in silence. Julia stared straight before her. Her tears were dried, but her heart was like lead. After a time Heron noticed how quiet her young lady was.

'Is anything the matter with you, dear?' she asked in a tender tone.

'I'm wretched, Heron; that's all.'

'Oh, my darling Miss Julia, and why should you be wretched? I'm sure, my darling, you're loved like anything. Everybody just worships you. Why should my little pet be sad?'

Julia turned swiftly, flung her arms round the old servant's neck, and burst into fresh weeping.

'Heron, do pity me,' she sobbed. 'It's a most awful thing; it's really quite a calamity. That new girl has come here, and has won over father and mother in the most ridiculous, horrid way. Oh Heron, I'm heart-broken! You don't know how she has behaved—getting another lamp lit in the drawing-room, and singing terrible rebel songs

about the "Wearing of the Green," and about a girl who allows men to kiss her, and a broken pitcher, and all sorts of horrors. And then she took father and mother upstairs to look at her horrible pets, and they're just delighted with her; they said so. But she's common and vulgar and'——

'Hush, darling—hush! I've been brushing her hair. I don't mean to compare her to you, but she has just the most wonderful hair I ever touched in all my life. It's like flames.'

'Nonsense!' said Julia, drying her eyes, and a fresh fit of passion filling her heart. 'It's not like flames; it's like carrots.'

'No, darling—no. I must be just to the young lady. It's exactly as if you had lit a fire and you saw the glow of light wherever you turned. It's simply splendid. And it's so soft—like spun silk; and so curly—each little wave makes the most lovely tendril. I said I didn't like red hair; but that hair—anybody would be proud of it.'

'Then you are going over to her too.'

'No, I ain't, Miss Julia. You are the very best and most loved of all girls to me, and no one can ever take your place. But listen now, my pet. The young lady has come, and she is a very pleasant, cheerful, chatty young person, and your father and mother have took to her; and it seems to me every one else in the place will take to her too; and the only chance for you, my darling, is to go with the stream. Love her and she'll love you. She's a generous sort of girl, and she'd never stand putting you second. Don't you put her back

up. She can't help being beautiful and winsome; she can't help having a voice like a bird and a smile like sunshine.'

'Heron,' said Julia, 'you can go away. I don't want my hair brushed any more to-night. You are like the others. Oh, I won't stand this!'

Heron longed to wait and to comfort the little girl, but it seemed hopeless. Julia was known to be stubbornness itself. She had been, just by the law of personal charm, suddenly made to take a second place, and this was more than the petted child, the only daughter of the house, could stand.

She fell asleep when she got into bed, just from sheer exhaustion; but she woke early the next morning to the remembrance once more of her sorrow, to puzzle over the hated Shirley, and to wonder how she could get rid of her. With father and mother infatuated, with Jones the coachman saying that she was a charming young lady, and with Heron singing her praises, what chance had poor Julia?

As she lay in bed, however, a thought came to her. Aunt Hannah! Aunt Hannah lived two miles away. She was her mother's step-sister, and a very prim, decidedly severe old lady. Aunt Hannah would not lose her head for any siren who ever walked this earth. Even the girl with the fascinating smile and the impish ways could not move her from the rigidity of her principles.

'I know what I'll do,' thought Julia. 'I'll go and see Aunt Hannah, and get her to invite herself to come and stay here. She will find out Shirley's weak spots. She will stick up for my rights;

she will sympathise with me. I always thought her a little too prim before, but I'm sure I love prim people at the present moment as I never loved them yet. Yes, Aunt Hannah will help me. She will speak to father and mother, and say that Shirley isn't a fit companion for me. Then they'll send her to school or something, and I'll be first once more and happy again.'

Julia felt quite soothed as the thought of Aunt Hannah came to her. The holidays were on at present, and she knew she might do pretty much as she liked.

She got up, therefore, very early, dressed herself swiftly before Heron could come to her assistance, and writing a little note, left it on her dressing-table. Her note ran as follows:

'Please, Heron, tell father and mother that I have gone to see Aunt Hannah, and will be back again by midday, or at latest to-night. I am riding over on Featherpate, so I shall not be at all tired.'

Having written this note, Julia very softly opened her room door. Shirley's room was next to hers. She by no means wished to wake her cousin; but, to her dismay, she saw that Shirley's door was already open, and that her bed was empty. The bird had flown!

'Oh dear, if I meet her what shall I do?' thought the little girl.

She made up her mind, however, to appeal to Aunt Hannah whatever happened, and ran downstairs. Most of the servants were still in bed.

An open window proclaimed that Shirley was out in the garden. Julia also stepped over the window-sill, and saw a sight which caused her heart to beat with fresh anger.

There stood Shirley all in white—in white from head to foot—with her splendid hair, her pretty, fair face, and her ringing laugh. She was laughing heartily at the gambols of a cat and three kittens and a small black Spitz. The kittens raced round the Spitz; the Spitz pretended to bark; the mother cat sat in serene dignity. On Shirley's hand reposed the parrot Mordecai. He looked occasionally round at her, and uttered the following words in a succession of sharp staccato notes, almost resembling the firing of pistols:

'What a bad, bad, bad young thing you are!'

Each time the parrot said these words Shirley laughed; then the parrot bowed his neck, opened his mouth, and repeated:

'What a bad, bad, bad young thing you are!'

'Oh dear,' thought Julia, 'if only I could get away before she sees me!'

But too late; Shirley had seen her. With a delighted cry she ran forward.

'This is good, Julia. I am so pleased! How are you, little coz?'

'Quite well,' replied Julia.

'Inclined to take a favourable view of life this morning?'

'I'm in a hurry,' said Julia.

'Where are you going, pretty coz?'

'To see an aunt of mine.'

'May I come with you?'

‘No. I’m sorry, but you really can’t. I have to see her on private business.’

‘About me, I suppose,’ said Shirley. ‘You must tell some one about the bad, bad, *bad* little thing who has come to live at The Grange.—Mordecai, my sweet, what sort of a creature is your Shirleykins?’

‘What a bad, bad, bad young thing you are!’ said Mordecai at once; and then he stretched out his beak and uttered a savage, angry note at Julia.

‘Good gracious! he’ll peck out my eyes,’ said Julia, in terror. ‘I’m very sorry; I’ll be back as soon as I can. Good-bye for the present.’

She ran round to the stables. The Spitz barked, the parrot shrieked, and the kittens mewed, but Shirley stood still, looking more beautiful than ever in the sunny, green lawn.

The grooms were already busy in the stables, and Julia in a short time had the side-saddle upon Featherpate. She mounted her fat Shetland pony and started off.

Soon she had left The Grange behind her, and was riding in jog-trot fashion along the dusty road. She felt a sense of relief. There was no one to rub her the wrong way. Aunt Hannah would welcome her to breakfast. She would be prim, of course, but beside Shirley all prim people were delicious.

‘She’s my godmother, too,’ thought the little girl; ‘she’s bound to help me. I shall throw myself upon her. She’ll do exactly what I want.’

Aunt Hannah’s cottage was uphill. It was half-way up the side of a very steep hill, but it, itself,

reposed in a little hollow. It was a very warm place, therefore, in summer, notwithstanding its high elevation. Aunt Hannah owned, just at the back of the cottage, about ten acres of pastoral land. Here her cows fed in peace and safety. She had a large chicken-run, and not very far from the house was an orchard filled with fruit, and a walled-in garden which was well kept and produced the finest and earliest strawberries of the day, the best raspberries, the largest gooseberries—in short, every sort of fruit.

Aunt Hannah herself was a thin, very much withered woman of about fifty-five years of age. She was Mrs Cairns's senior by fifteen years. She was not the least like Mrs Cairns, for beauty had never been given to Aunt Hannah Jeffries. Her upper lip was very long, her face thin and extremely sallow; her eyes were small and dark gray in colour; she had scanty hair, still rather black, but gray round the temples and forehead. She was a tall woman, with angular limbs and long, tapering hands. Her feet were flat and wide. She was certainly very plain.

But Aunt Hannah had her virtues. She was absolutely truthful, and although she was prim she was not unkind. She was the cleverest jam-maker, and the most splendid producer of cordials, liqueurs, chutneys, sauces, and all sorts of balms for bruises and cut knees, that the country-side could boast. Streams of women, bringing children requiring medicine or treatment, approached the little cottage, which went by the strange name of The Wayside Bower, each morning.

Early as Julia was on the road, she was not as early as two women who each carried a large baby in her arms. Behind them was an old creature full of rheumatism. They were all going for cures and sympathy and help to The Wayside Bower.

‘She is good; that is what I call real kindness,’ thought Julia.

She nodded to the women, who knew her and said, ‘Mornin’, missy,’ and the girl went tranquilly on her way. It really was delightful to get away from The Grange.

By-and-by she reached the wicket-gate. She jumped off her pony, unfastened the gate, and found herself going up the winding path. The women had gone by a short cut up a steep meadow, and were already waiting outside the porch. As Julia approached, Aunt Hannah came out and began to speak to them. She looked up and saw her niece, and waved her hand.

‘I’ll attend to you presently, Julia,’ she said.—‘Now then, Mary Davis, rheumatism worse than ever?’

‘I haven’t got a wink of sleep, your ladyship, for the last three nights,’ murmured Mary Davis.

‘Well, here, you rub this Jacob’s oil well into the stiff part, take this medicine, and come back in a week.—Now then, Kate Jones, what’s the matter with the child?’

The child had a burn—rather a bad one—on his leg. Miss Jeffries produced the necessary ointment. The women, with murmured blessings, turned back and went on their homeward way.

‘Now then, Julia,’ said her aunt. ‘My dear child, what has brought you here so early in the morning?’

‘I’ve come to see you, Aunt Hannah. I want to see you very badly.’

‘What about?—your lessons, your governess, your’——

‘You forget, Aunt Hannah, that it is holiday-time.’

‘Bless me! so I had. Well, child, and what do you want?’

‘I want to say a lot. May I come in? And will you give me some breakfast?’

‘Of course I will give you breakfast, my dear. Take your pony round to the stables, and then join me in the breakfast-room. Breakfast is ready, and you are welcome. Be quick, child, for I am as peckish as ever I can be.’

Julia knew Aunt Hannah’s ways well. She did not wait a moment, therefore, in going into the house. When she got there she opened a baize door, traversed the entire length of a long passage, and found herself in a neatly kept lavatory where both hot and cold water were to be obtained. She washed her hands, and also smoothed her pretty, mouse-coloured hair. Then, content with herself and feeling quite soothed and comforted, she went into a little tiled kitchen sort of a room where Aunt Hannah invariably had her meals. The tiles were bright red, with a white border, and no place could look prettier or cooler in summer than this dainty sort of kitchen-parlour. There was a little stove at one end, which was so

managed that it scarcely added to the heat. The lattice-windows were open, and the cloth on the table, which could accommodate only two, was coarse in texture, but very white—white as snow. The breakfast service was of coarse white delf, but also clean and good to use. The knives had black handles; the spoons were thick, but of solid silver.

Aunt Hannah, looking primmer and more severe than ever, took her place before the tea-urn.

‘Come, Julia,’ she said, ‘help yourself. There’s a brown loaf, and there’s salt butter. I consider it waste of time in hot weather to make fresh; it turns sour immediately. There’s a dish of porridge on the side-table, if you wish for it; and here’s cold bacon. Oh yes, and you can have an egg. I’ll tell Betty to cook one. Are you satisfied, my dear?’

‘I don’t want an egg, and I don’t want bacon,’ said Julia; ‘nor do I wish for porridge. I’d just like to have a cup of tea and to talk to you.’

‘Fiddle-de-dee and fiddlesticks!’ was Miss Jeffries’ exclamation. ‘I’ll stand no nonsense from little girls. Eat you will, or you’ll have a dose of medicine; so now take your choice.’

Julia laughed. ‘Very well, then, Aunt Hannah; I’ll have a little brown bread and butter.’

‘Hysterical,’ was Aunt Hannah’s murmured comment, but she did not say it loud enough for Julia to hear. She ate her own meal with great heartiness and in absolute silence, munching her bread and bacon, drinking a cup of strong tea

with plenty of cream and sugar in it, and finally winding up with a huge plate of gooseberries.

'I gathered these myself before six o'clock this morning,' she said, 'so they ought to be good. Have some, Julia.'

'No, thank you, aunty.'

'Fiddle-de-dee and fiddlesticks!' was Aunt Hannah's next remark. 'Eat your gooseberries and be thankful.'

Julia took them with a faint smile.

'More hysterical even than I thought,' was Aunt Hannah's inward comment.

She waited very calmly. She was a most vigorous woman—all on wires, so to speak—but she could sit still enough when she liked. Now she sat with her hands folded in her lap, her small gray eyes fixed on her niece's face.

'Why do you look at me like that, Aunt Hannah?'

'Because I am considering what a plain, awkward-looking girl you are growing up,' was Miss Hannah's comment.

Julia could not help laughing. After a moment she sprang to her feet, ran round to her old aunt, and flung her arms round her neck.

'I love you,' she said, 'because you are so—so truthful.'

'Heavens! what ails the child?' said Aunt Hannah. 'You have pushed my cap awry. Now then, my dear, out with it!'

'Aunt Hannah,' said Julia, 'you hate affectation, don't you?'

'Loathe it,' said Aunt Hannah. 'I won't have

anything to do with it. When I see affected persons I always long to snuff 'em out.'

'And so do I.'

'We are made alike, Julia,' said her aunt, again fixing her small eyes on the little girl's face. 'It is a sad pity we are both so plain. No man ever took to me, and I don't think it likely that any man will ever take to you. But if you are good everything will be as it ought to be, my dear. My mother brought me up on the motto, "Handsome is as handsome does," and I have stuck to it all through my life.'

'Aunt Hannah, never mind about my looks now, nor about my future. I dare say what you have remarked is quite true, and that I shall be an old maid. I don't mind; at present I hate all men except father.'

'You will pine for some handsome, good-for-nothing, ramshackle lad some day, just like the rest of 'em—just like the rest of 'em,' said Aunt Hannah.

'Oh no, I won't.'

Aunt Hannah sprang to her feet.

'Have you done breakfast, child?'

'Yes, aunty.'

'Then come into the porch.—Betty, clear up; and be quick.'

This last remark was shouted to the elderly woman who served Miss Hannah Jeffries with all her might and main, and loved her with all the strength of an affectionate but somewhat surly nature.

'Ah! Betty's the sort for me,' said Aunt Hannah

—‘sour without but sweet within—sweet to the core within. That’s what I like. Now then, Julia, you are my godchild and all the rest of it, and maybe some day I’ll leave you the cottage and the bit of land, and—— But no matter; you are in a bit of girlish trouble, and it’s affecting your nerves, and you look particularly silly. But what’s it all about? Tell your old aunt.’

‘Aunt Hannah, it’s Shirley.’

‘And who in the name of nonsense is Shirley? A man?’

‘No, Aunt Hannah; a girl. She’s called after a novel of that name written by a very great author.’

‘I never read novels, child, so that tells me nothing. A girl called Shirley? Go on.’

‘Her name is Shirley Kendal, and she is father’s niece. She has arrived. How it came to pass I don’t know, but she arrived yesterday, and she is going to live with us for at least a year. I don’t know anything more except that she has come.’

‘Well,’ said Aunt Hannah after a moment, ‘and a very good thing too. I have always felt that you needed companions, Julia. You are growing odd as fast as ever you can, and that ought to be put a stop to with a girl only fifteen. She will rub you up, of course, my dear, but that is just what is necessary. You will be a lop-sided apple-tree if you don’t take care. A girl such as I hope she is will prune you both sides, and keep you growing straight. Why, my dear, look at that

tree over there standing all by itself. I'm going to prune that next autumn. It's grown out all on the left, and is nowhere to the south. It must be pruned, and so must you, Julia.'

'Aunt Hannah,' said Julia, 'may I tell you? Let me tell you.'

And then she poured out a torrent of angry words. She was so excited and so overwrought that she exaggerated very considerably. Aunt Hannah made allowance for that, and did her best to subtract the residuum of truth at the bottom of Julia's wild words. At last, when the little girl finished, she spoke.

'Some things you tell me I don't like, but there are others I admire. But she must be an affected piece, and that is not to be borne.'

'It's the way she has turned father and mother round, so that they'd do anything in the world for her, that makes me so truly miserable,' said Julia.

'Well, Julia, that's the trouble—the whole of it?'

'Yes, Aunt Hannah.'

'And you have come to me thinking I can help you?'

'If you can't, no one can, Aunt Hannah. But, Aunt Hannah, if no one does anything—if what was so dreadful the first night is to go on getting worse and worse—I'll have to beg and pray of father and mother to send me to school. Do you think they would?'

'I can't say; they're pretty fond of you, as things go.'

'Then I'll beg and beseech. I won't rest until I have my own way, for I can't live in the house with her.'

'You can please yourself, of course,' said Aunt Hannah. 'Provided your father and mother agree, no one else can interfere. You can go to school, and when you return in the holidays Shirley will be queen, and you will be nowhere.'

'Oh, Aunt Hannah, that's true! And there must be holidays. And how am I to give up my darling home? What shall I do?'

'Let me think,' said Aunt Hannah.

She got up and walked away. She went into the house, and through the house into her garden, which sloped up the steep hillside. To get to Aunt Hannah's garden you had to go up steps cut in the walks; and even then you had to be a good climber, and to have a very sound heart, to be able to visit all that little mountain of cultivated land. It lay full to the south; and the fruit—well, the fruit was worth a lot of trouble. Aunt Hannah looked at it now, and then she glanced around her.

'Poor bit of a thing!' she said to herself. 'It's hard on her. And yet she must not be dealt with softly. She must have her little dash of vinegar, and her little spice of cayenne, and a little morsel of salt, and all the other things that bring out the sweet flavours of life. She has just been coddled up to the present; and, truth to tell, she has been a dull little soul, although she belongs to me and is my very own god-child.'

Aunt Hannah picked some strawberries. She brought them in a green leaf to Julia.

'You ought to be going home Julia,' she said; 'but eat these first.'

'How in the world am I to go home without your help and your advice? You have said nothing.'

'Eat your strawberries, Julia.'

'Aunt Hannah, I don't want them.'

'Foolish child! Then I will eat them. Here, let us eat them together—you one, I the other. Why, Julia, we are as alike as two peas, and we ought to have the same tastes.'

Julia held out her little hand and received a berry, which quickly found its way to her red lips. She ate one, then two, then another and another. Aunt Hannah sat quite quiet until the fresh, lovely fruit was finished.

'You really want me to help you?' she then said.

'Yes.'

'What do you propose yourself?'

'Leave the farm for a few days and come and stay with father and mother.'

'Well, I never! And haymaking-time coming on, and all the fruit to be picked, and all the preserves to be made, and a lot of fresh liqueurs begun. I'm making cherry brandy the like of which your father never tasted before. And the bees are swarming, and we have to secure the swarms. Child, you ask the impossible.'

'You could come for two or three days. You could return to the farm every day. Oh, won't you help me?'

'All right, child. When you look at me like that, I remember the day when you were carried into church, and I held you in my arms and promised to fight the world, the flesh, and the devil for you and with you. All right, Julia. But now, remember one thing. If I come to The Grange, I don't take your part any more than I take that girl's with the outlandish name; I take the part of right. If you are in the right I am free to say so, but if you are in the wrong I am there to say that also. Now you understand.'

'I do—I do. But you won't be overcome by her fascinations? That's all I ask.'

'I'm none so sure. You take the risk. Suppose I go over to her too.'

'Oh, Aunt Hannah!'

'Don't look so woebegone, my dear little girl. Ride home as fast as you can and ask your good mother to get the north room ready for me—the north bedroom, for I don't like too much luxury or an overheated room; it prevents my sleeping. Now go; I will be with you by the afternoon, and I will stay with you to-night and the whole of to-morrow. But the next day home I come again. No need to thank me. If I can help a little girl at a pinch, as that little girl happens to belong to me, why, I will, and with a heart and a half.'

'Oh, she is a darling—a darling!' thought Julia as she rode away.

She felt comforted and restored and strengthened. She believed she could stand anything now. Yes,

Aunt Hannah would certainly tell the truth, and give her judgment in favour of the person whom she considered the most to be pitied and the most in the right. But she would not be flattered and brought over by sheer witchery to the side of a total stranger.

‘I don’t mind anything at all now,’ thought Julia as she put her pony to a canter and returned home.

CHAPTER IV.

JEALOUSY.



It was between eleven and twelve o'clock when Julia got back to The Grange. She asked eagerly for her cousin, and was met by the information that Miss Shirley had gone riding with Mr Cairns.

'Dear me!' said Julia; 'surely that can't be good for father.'

She desired her groom to take her pony to the stables, and swinging off her hat, ran into the wide, cool hall.

'Where is mother?' she asked of the footman.

'She is in the storeroom, Miss Julia.'

Julia scampered off as fast as she could in the direction of the storeroom. There she found Mrs Cairns busily engaged with the upper housemaid, discussing all sorts of household matters. When she saw Julia she held up her hand for a moment.

'I'll attend to you, darling, in the schoolroom in a few minutes.—Now then, Simpson.'

The conversation continued. Julia nearly stamped her foot.

'I thought mother at least would have cared,' she thought to herself.

She ran to the schoolroom, feeling more miserable

than she had ever done before in her life. As a rule it was her father and mother who were waiting for her, ready to listen to her practising; to look over her sketches; to propose that she should read aloud to them; to plan the afternoon with a view to her delight. But this morning no one seemed to have time to think about her. Although her father had asked her to read the leaders in the *Times* to him every day, and though the hour fixed was between eleven and twelve o'clock, he was far away, riding with the objectionable Shirley; and her mother, absorbed in household duties, had no time to give to her.

Oh yes, at last that was her step—her dear step!

Julia, who had flung herself into an arm-chair by the open window, sprang to her feet when Mrs Cairns appeared.

‘Ah, mother darling, I am so glad to see you at last! Kiss me—kiss me—kiss me!’

Mrs Cairns kissed her little daughter very tenderly.

‘What possessed you to go off and see Aunt Hannah so early this morning?’ she asked. ‘But you look tired, my love—tired and hot. Why did you come back in the middle of the day?’

‘Why did I come back, mother? With all my duties to attend to—my practising, my sketches, and my reading to father!’

‘Your father has gone out riding with dear Shirley,’ said Mrs Cairns.

‘Dear Shirley! Oh, she is dear Shirley now!’

‘Yes, Julia, she is a very delightful and lovable girl. She wanted to go for a ride, and as it was

so fine, and with such a pleasant breeze, your father thought he could not do better than take her. So he is riding Harkaway, and he has lent Shirley his hunter, Fleetfoot.'

'Mother! Father would never let me ride Fleet-foot!'

'That is not because he loves you less, but because you are not an accomplished rider like Shirley.'

'Then she can ride too? She seems to be able to do everything.'

'She learnt in South America.'

'At this hour generally, when father didn't want me, you did,' said Julia after a pause.

'And so I do want you, Julia.'

'Well then, after I have told you something, shall we begin our French at once?'

Mrs Cairns looked uneasy.

'The fact is,' she said, 'I have promised Shirley to get a special room ready for all her pets. I must superintend the arrangements, for Dawson is too busy. Those sweet kittens! Oh, my dear Julia, I have just lost my heart to them; I have really. And their comical names, too—Pop, Drop, and Clover. Oh Julia, if you only saw Pop! He gathers up his whole body and springs over Clover in such a ludicrous way, turning a somersault as he does so.'

'Never mind that, mother. So I can't read French with you to-day?'

'I am afraid not this morning; and these are the holidays.'

'You have no time to listen?'

‘I’m afraid I haven’t. You see, I promised the dear child.’

‘And father, who promised me to wait in to listen to the *Times* leaders’——

‘Well, Julia, you were out, and the child wanted a ride, and the morning’——

‘Don’t go on, mother—don’t! I understand. Mother dear, I have some news for you. It has nothing to do with Shirley—at least in one way it has nothing to do with her. I went to see Aunt Hannah this morning, and she sent you a message.’

‘You know, Julia, I am always glad you should go to my dear sister, your most admirable aunt.’

‘She is coming here some time this afternoon.’

‘Is she? Why?’

‘Mother, I asked her. I want to have some one on my side in this matter. Mother, I am a very miserable girl.’

Julia burst into tears. Mrs Cairns looked at her without understanding. How her good-humoured, bright little daughter could have so suddenly changed almost past recognition was a puzzle which the good lady could not solve. That Julia’s attitude and conduct were the result of mere jealousy she could not believe. She felt annoyed and not very sympathetic. If Julia were ill she would have been up in arms with excitement and desire to help her at once. But Julia was not ill; there was no question of illness in the matter. And then Mrs Cairns was so anxious to see about the kittens. If the truth must be known, her fingers were trembling to have a game of romps

with Pop, Drop, and Clover. She fancied herself down on her knees shaking a ball in front of the kittens; she fancied herself laughing merrily over their ridiculous antics. She thought that if she could squeeze those little bunches of fur and mischief in her arms she would be quite happy. She was a sober married lady, but the kittens fascinated her as much as Shirley did herself.

‘Well, my darling,’ she said, ‘I am glad your aunt is coming. I am always glad to welcome her.’

‘She wants the north room, mother. She can’t stand the sun or too much comfort.’

‘Oh, poor, dear Hannah! Well, she shall have it. Run and tell the servants to get it ready. Simpson’s upstairs; go up to her at once. Any of your aunt’s little fads that you know of, tell Simpson about; and then you can come to me. I shall be in the white corridor. I am going to give Shirley the little green room that nobody uses, and turn it into a sort of menagerie for her pets. You will find me there, the Spitz, Mordecai, and the cat and kittens in my company.’

Mrs Cairns trotted off without waiting for Julia’s reply. Julia pressed both her hands to her eyes. She stood still for a minute, struggling with fierce emotion which had hitherto been foreign to her nature.

‘To think that this time twenty-four hours ago I was happy and light-hearted, and rather pleased than otherwise that she was coming! To think of that time—and this!’

Then she ran upstairs and gave Simpson emphatic

directions. When she had done so she paused, a sense of bewilderment filling her heart.

To go to the green room which led out of the white corridor—to go to the green room to see her mother making a fool of herself—was very far from her intention. No, the outside world was more to her taste, more soothing than the inner.

She went out, swung herself into a hammock under a shady tree, and shut her eyes. At first her heart beat fast and her pulses bounded wildly. After a time the stillness and coolness had the usual effect. She was soothed in spite of herself. Her early ride that morning, and all the emotion she had lived through, conduced now to sleepiness. Julia, lying in the hammock, began first to see things far off; then gradually her eyes closed and she slept.

She was awakened by a light touch on her cheek, and by the feeling that some one had placed a little shawl over her so as to secure her from the chill she might get from sleeping under a tree. She felt comforted. Her mother had often done this for her on former occasions. She said now in a sleepy voice:

‘Thank you, mumsy. I am so cosy, I don’t think I will stir till lunch-time.’

There was no answer, but Julia in her sleepy condition imagined that her mother had seated herself by her side, and she dropped off again into slumber. Her sleep was dreamless; she did not awaken until the lunch-gong sounded all over the front lawn. Then she sat up, and saw that Shirley was in the chair beside her—Shirley, all in white,

her eyes very brilliant, and that hair which seemed to mock and irritate, and at the same time to cause unwilling admiration, fuzzy and curly all over her head.

‘I am so glad you had a sleep, Julia!’ said Shirley. ‘You looked so tired at first, but now you are rested. What did you do with yourself all the morning? Was Aunt Hannah in?’

‘She is not your aunt,’ said the little girl in a rude tone.

‘I know that. What shall I call her?’

‘Miss Jeffries, of course. People don’t speak of others by their Christian names until they know them well.’

Shirley gave a quick sigh, then began to whistle in a chirpy sort of way. Julia raised herself on her elbow. The Persian cat, accompanied by its three kittens, played on the lawn. Mordecai in his cage was close by. Mops was curled up fast asleep on Shirley’s lap. And presently Pop, who was of a more daring nature than the others, sprang on to his mistress’s lap, ensconced himself on Mops’s black body, and gazed impudently up into Shirley’s face. Her dancing eyes attracted his attention, and he put up one innocent-looking paw as though he would extract an eye and examine it more carefully.

Shirley laughed, and was about to put him on the ground, when he suddenly perceived Julia in the hammock. Now, Julia was a stranger to him—or practically so—and Pop was of an inquiring turn of mind. Without a moment’s hesitation, he bounded from Shirley’s lap into the hammock,



‘What a cruel girl you are!’ she said.

curled up close to Julia's heart, and looked at her with the blue, beseeching eyes of a kitten. Julia longed to squeeze him and to say, 'Little darling!' but she restrained herself. She moved slightly, and the kitten made a spring at her hand.

'Oh, don't! you are scratching me,' said Julia.

'Come, pet, to me,' said Shirley.

But before she could take it from the hammock, Julia, whose temper was getting worse and worse, sprang out, tumbling the little kitten as she did so with some violence to the ground. Just for an instant the little creature was stunned. Shirley sprang to her feet, picked it up, and pressed it to her cheek.

'What a cruel girl you are!' she said, her eyes flashing. 'How am I to endure you? There! I don't want to show you any of my pets.—Come, little darling.—I don't know how ever a father and mother so sweet and kind as yours could have got a daughter like you. I call it an affliction. You have hurt my pet, my little treasure. Oh, my Popsy-wopsy—oh, my sweet!'

She took no more notice of Julia, but walked slowly to the house. Julia stood still for a minute; then she followed her. She was not at all as angry as she expected to be. On the contrary, she rather admired Shirley for rounding on her, as she expressed it.

'It was cruel of me to hurt that poor little thing,' she thought. 'I hope it isn't badly hurt.'

She entered the house. Shirley had taken the rest of her pets to the green room, which was now

thoroughly prepared for their reception; but she carried the hurt kitten into the dining-room.

‘What is the matter with it?’ said Mrs Cairns.

Mr Cairns also came up.

‘It upset its dear little self and got a fall,’ said Shirley.—‘Don’t *miaou* like that, my kitty-kitty.’

Mr Cairns took the kitten from Shirley and began to examine it very carefully.

‘I am afraid it has hurt one of its legs,’ he said. ‘I believe I can put it all right, however. I used to be very fond of anatomy in the old days. No, it isn’t broken; but I think it is twisted. Poor, dear little thing!’

When Julia entered the room she found the three busily absorbed over the kitten, lunch cooling on the table. Julia’s very short repentance evaporated on beholding this scene.

‘Julia,’ said Mrs Cairns in an excited voice, ‘this poor kitten is hurt.’

‘I’m sorry,’ said Julia. Then she added, looking full at Shirley, ‘I didn’t mean it, of course.’

‘Did you do it, Julia?’ said her father, his eyes quite flashing.

‘Not intentionally, father. I was in the hammock, and the kitten began to scratch me, and I tumbled out quickly and upset the little cat, and it twisted itself in some way. I didn’t mean it, of course; you know that.’

Mr Cairns looked displeased.

‘You didn’t tell us that, Shirley,’ he said.

‘No,’ said Shirley. ‘Why should I? It is really worse for Julia than for me.—I am sorry, Julia, that I lost my temper.’

‘Odious girl!’ thought Julia. ‘She apologises before them in order to make them think all the better of her. Oh, thank goodness, dear Aunt Hannah will be here this afternoon! She sees to the bottom of people. She will soon give my dear young lady something for herself.’

The kitten was put into a basket, and Mr Cairns was induced to take his lunch. The meal proceeded with a great deal of animation. Shirley chatted and laughed.

‘Are you really going to take me to Dalston ruins after lunch?’ she asked, looking at Mr Cairns.

Mrs Cairns bent forward to speak to Julia.

‘It is such a beautiful, warm day,’ she said, ‘that I thought we might take your cousin to see the ruins this afternoon. We could have tea in the steward’s lodge at the gates. It would be nice for you both. You would like it, wouldn’t you, Julia?’

‘I can’t possibly go,’ said Julia; ‘Aunt Hannah is coming.’

She made this remark in the tone of one who expected all the others to say that they would give up the expedition on the spot. But Mr Cairns scarcely looked sorry. Mrs Cairns was silent for a moment.

‘Perhaps you ought to stay to greet your aunt,’ she said then.—‘What do you think, Stephen?’

‘Perhaps she ought. But I can’t imagine why Hannah is coming to us just now; she is so busily engaged with her farm.’

‘Aunt Hannah is coming because I want her,’ said Julia. ‘She is my godmother, remember.’

It was with difficulty she could keep back the tears from her eyes. Mr Cairns said:

‘Certainly, my love—certainly. Help me to a cutlet, Julia; that brown one, just there. Thank you, that will do nicely. Your cousin isn’t eating as much as she ought. Can’t you tempt her to something?’

‘What will you have?’ said Julia, staring full at Shirley. ‘Please yourself; there is plenty on the table.’

Shirley asked for a cutlet. Now, there was only one left, and Julia meant to eat it herself. She gave it up without demur, however, but refused the cold meat that was offered to her.

Mrs Cairns at last began to examine her little daughter’s face with a sense of uneasiness. Was Julia really quite well? What could be the matter with her? She was as different from the pleasant, obliging, gentle little girl whom Mrs Cairns had called her daughter this time yesterday as though she were a totally different person.

Lunch came to an end. Shirley and Mr Cairns disappeared into the latter’s study to doctor the kitten’s leg. Mrs Cairns turned to Julia.

‘I wish you would go, Julia,’ she said. ‘Now that I consider matters, I think it would be best for me to stay at home to receive your aunt. She will probably have a great deal to say to me; and you have seen her already this morning.’

‘Oh no, mother; I’d much rather you went.’

‘Well, darling, whatever you wish. Perhaps you have been out long enough. You look pale, my

Julia. Your ride in the heat of the sun was too much for you.'

'I am quite well, really, mother.'

'Kiss me, dearest.'

Julia gave a cold little kiss.

'What will you do with yourself in our absence?

Practise as usual?'

'I think not, mother.'

'Read your French?'

'No, mother—no.'

'Then what will you do, darling? Your needle-work? I don't know any one who sews as beautifully as my little daughter.'

'Thank you for the compliment, mother, but somehow it doesn't please me to-day.'

'Does anything please you to-day, Julia? My own darling child, what is the matter with you?'

'Everything—and nothing,' said the girl almost roughly. 'Take no notice of me, mother; I'll bear it presently.'

'But what have you to bear, dearest?'

'Oh mother, can't you guess? You and father—you are giving all your love to that new girl; I am nothing, nothing, nothing!'

'My Julie! my darling! How mistaken you are! If you only knew! She is just a stranger; she is an orphan—poor, sweet child!—and she is so attractive; but if you suppose that she takes your place'—

'It is nothing, mother—it is nothing. I suppose I am horrid, but I can't help my feelings. You see, I don't like her or admire her in any way.'

‘Aunt Charity! Aunt Charity!’ here called a gay voice in the distance; and Shirley, dressed for her drive, entered the room.

All her costumes were of the prettiest, and the shady hat, with its drooping feathers, which covered her brilliant head caused Mrs Cairns to admire her more than ever. She was an exceedingly graceful girl, and the very tones of her voice were calculated to awaken admiration.

‘I wish you would come with us, Julia,’ she said at once. ‘It is going to be such a perfect day! Oh, I am so pleased and happy! Dear Aunt Charity, you make me so happy; and so does Uncle Stephen. I only want Julia’s love to be the most lucky girl on earth.’

Julia was silent.

‘Uncle Stephen is so clever,’ continued Shirley, hardly glancing at her cousin. ‘He has set my Popsy’s leg. He has put it into a splint, so the darling doesn’t feel the strain. He’ll be all right to-morrow or the next day.’

The footman sounded the gong in the hall; the carriage was waiting outside the porch. It was a beautiful landau, and the two horses, with their silver harness, looked lovely in the sunshine.

‘Ah!’ said Shirley, darting into the hall and looking out, ‘that is the sort of thing I like to drive in. I am so glad it isn’t the brougham!’

She laughed and looked at Julia, but the little girl made no reply. Mr Cairns came out in a minute or two and stepped into the carriage. He nodded to his little daughter.

‘Sorry you are not coming with us, Julie,’ he

said. 'But I dare say you are right. I am always glad to see unselfishness, my dear.'

He did not wait for her answer, but motioned to the coachman to start, and Julia went back into the house.

How empty and dull it seemed!

'Just like my life,' thought the little girl. 'How am I to bear this? I declare I will go to school. It is all very well for mother to talk, but actions speak louder than words, and they're both head over ears in love with Shirley. Ah!' exclaimed the little girl, with a cry of rapture, 'there comes Aunt Hannah—walking, too, and carrying that big bag. Dear, darling, ugly, sweet old lady, how I adore her!'

Julia rushed down the avenue and up to her aunt's side.

'I'm a bit hot,' said that lady. 'You can carry that bag for a little, Julia.'

'Oh! let it lie on the ground, aunty. Here's a nice seat under these poplar-trees. You'll be cool here; and I'll lie at your feet.'

'But I want to see your father and mother; they will think it so rude of me.'

'Not a bit of it. You and I, aunty, will have the whole of the afternoon to ourselves. They have gone off with the witch. She has lured them to the Dalston ruins, ten miles away. They won't be back till it's time to dress for dinner.'

Aunt Hannah did not reply for an instant. Her small gray eyes were twinkling. She looked past Julia over the smoothly kept lawns, the dazzling bright flowers, the old-fashioned, gray, yet snug

house, reposing in its own grounds with the dignity which centuries of age confer; and there was the little girl to whom one day it would belong, a discontented frown between her brows, her lips set in peevish lines, her whole nature absorbed with self.

‘What am I to do for her?’ thought Aunt Hannah. ‘She will be rich some day, and will have an important position, but what are any of these things worth if she cannot control her temper?’

‘What are you thinking of, Aunt Hannah?’ said Julia.

‘Why shouldn’t I think, my dear?’

‘But what about?’

‘Suppose I don’t tell you.’

‘Aunt, you must. It is so delightful to have you here! Now that you are here, I don’t mind the fact that the others are gone. If anything, I am rather glad; I am really. It is so nice to have you here!’

‘I am glad to be with you, Julia. Of course, I have sacrificed something to come; but now that I have arrived I hope I shall be of use.’

‘You are always that, aunty. But what were you thinking of when you looked so—so’——

‘What, my child?’

‘So full of thought. Your thoughts are always worth having. I love people to think; I hate empty-headed chatterers.’

‘Really, Julia, you are somewhat severe for so young a girl. I will tell you if you like. I don’t mean to preach a sermon in any sense with it, but

you shall have it; you can make whatever you fancy with it.'

'Yes?' said Julia.

'It was only the memory of an old-fashioned text which returned to me. My mother used to teach it to me. The text was this: "Greater is he that ruleth his spirit than he who taketh a city."'

Julia coloured. She rose to her feet.

'Aunt Hannah,' she said, 'you have come; I have asked you to come. You said you might go over to the enemy, but I don't think you will. All I ask of you is this: do what you like, but don't—don't lecture me.'

'Very well, child—very well. Now then, come to the house; we won't idle any more.'

'You are so restless, aunty!'

'Not at all; but I have a good bit to do, and I am getting on in life. If I can't finish up before I go I shall feel discontented. I mean I shall feel I am not a good servant—a good and profitable servant. Now then, child, you said I wasn't to lecture you, and I believe I have about done.'

Yes, Julia enjoyed her afternoon. Aunt Hannah was all that was delightful. She talked, saying terse, sharp, clever things. She discussed the farm and Julia's future. She insisted on seeing all Shirley's pets, admired them immensely, took the lame kitten in her lap and soothed the poor little thing to sleep, and told Julia that she ought to be very much ashamed of herself. She actually put her finger between the bars of Mordecai's cage, and he was so astonished that he did not even peck it. He looked at her attentively, and then she stroked

his head; and he bent that same head low, thereby showing that he enjoyed the attention. As to Mops, he took some time to reconcile himself either to Julia or Aunt Hannah, but he did presently. In short, the whole menagerie was on the best of terms with the old lady by the time the carriage returned bearing Mr and Mrs Cairns and Shirley.

‘Ah, there is Hannah!’ said Mrs Cairns.—‘Hannah dear, it is very good of you to leave the farm and come over to see us. We are so pleased!’

‘How do you do, Hannah?’ said Mr Cairns. ‘Let me introduce my niece, Shirley Kendal.—Shirley, you have heard us speak of Miss Hannah Jeffries.’

‘How do you do?’ said Shirley.

She spoke almost shyly. This lady was Julia’s friend. She had probably heard a good deal that was bad of her. But Miss Jeffries regarded the sweet, smiling face with approval.

‘How do you do, my dear? Glad to welcome you to our part of the world. I hope you and my dear niece and goddaughter will be the best of friends. She needs some one to draw her out a little. On the other hand, her society will be excellent for you. Julia has her good—her very good points. I will tell you more about her presently.’

‘I wish you would. I should so like to understand her!’

‘She is quite worth understanding, Shirley; as I have no doubt you are too. Well, I wish to say that I have made friends with your pets. The kittens are most enticing. The little lame one is better; it slept on my knee for a bit. Your dog

is a thoroughbred, and a very good specimen. Mops, do you call him? He is a nice little fellow. But of all your pets the one I prefer is Mordecai.'

'Oh, do you really?' said Shirley, her eyes dancing. 'Poor old Mordecai! Most people are afraid of him.'

'Ah!' said Aunt Hannah, 'I never was afraid of anything—neither man, beast, nor bird. Your Mordecai took to me. I expect I am a somewhat rasping old body, and he certainly can rasp if he likes.'

'Do you know,' said Julia, who had not spoken up to the present, 'Aunt Hannah had the courage to put her finger between the bars, and the parrot was so astonished that he didn't peck at her.'

Shirley laughed joyously.

'How lovely!' she said. 'Will you come and see them all again with me after dinner?'

'Certainly, if your uncle and aunt approve.'

'Of course we approve,' said Mr Cairns. 'I expect, Shirley, we shall all retire to the green room in a body. The new menagerie in our midst is most enticing.'

'I always told you,' said Aunt Hannah, 'that you didn't half-understand life until you had stepped into the animal world. I am glad Shirley has brought some along with her.'

CHAPTER V.

RETROSPECT.



HAT evening passed without anything special occurring. Aunt Hannah made herself agreeable in her own grim way. She did not dream of dressing for dinner; she came down in the gray alpaca which she had worn during all the hot afternoon. But she had on a clean collar and cuffs, and her iron-gray hair was arranged tightly and primly round her head. She wore a cap, which is scarcely fashionable now, even for quite old ladies. She sat near Mr Cairns and led the conversation; in consequence it was intensely interesting. Shirley could scarcely keep her bright eyes from Aunt Hannah's face; there was no doubt that the quaint old lady pleased her very much.

When dinner was over, the entire party, including Mr Cairns, retired to the drawing-room. Shirley went up to Aunt Hannah.

'I want you to tell me about your place, The Wayside Bower, and the garden that runs up a steep hill. It must be lovely; it must be unlike any other place.'

'Are you fond of quaint and strange places, Shirley?'

'I love everything quaint and strange,' answered the girl.

'You must have had an adventurous life, my dear. Sit down on this stool and tell me about it.'

As Aunt Hannah spoke she raised her eyes and looked full at Julia.

'Come here, goddaughter,' she said. 'Here is another stool. You two girls shall sit one on each side of me, and Shirley shall tell us her adventures.—Come, Julia, I shall not be happy unless I hold your little hand in mine.—Now then, Shirley, begin.'

'But what am I to say?' asked the girl, laughing.

'Tell me where you were born, where you have lived, what you have done.'

'I was born in India,' said Shirley at once. 'But the first place I remember is South America. I was there when I was about four years old. My grandmother had Mexican blood in her veins, and I think that is why I am so wild and restless at times. My mother died so long ago that I can scarcely remember her, so I lived with my father. Father was all in all to me.'

She paused. Her voice had a husky sound. She looked away from Aunt Hannah and from Julia. The slim little white hands which were folded in her lap trembled.

'Father spent nearly all his time in South America. He used to train horses, but he had a big estate. We had lots of servants. There were slaves for a time, but I don't remember that. Only the freed slaves waited on us. The whole life was

luxurious. We had tropical fruits and flowers. I remember how dreadful I thought the first touch of real cold when I left South America. But that was some time ago. Father taught me to ride, and I rode anything barebacked. No buck-jumper that ever lived could unseat me. I used to love to rush over the great plains. My pony was called Fleet as the Wind. He was such a beauty! Oh yes, those were good times!'

'They must have been exciting,' said Aunt Hannah.

'I didn't think so at the time; but, you see, I had never known any other life. Then father died, and I had a bad time; but that did not last very long. I had an old relation whom I called Aunt Bridget; she was really a very distant cousin. She was Irish by birth. She took me away with her to Europe, where we stayed for a bit, and then we went to Egypt. Aunt Bridget was quite rich and very kind. She was a great traveller. We visited all sorts of places—Greece, Smyrna, Damascus, the Holy Land. Once we lived for six weeks in a caravan, and aunty and I were the only women of the party. Oh, it was grand fun! I used to ride the camels then, but I did not like them as well as my fleet South American horses. It was after Aunt Bridget died that it was decided I should come to England, and then dear, kind Uncle Stephen wrote and invited me to come here for a year. I believe I am rich, but I don't know. Aunt Bridget gave me all the education I possess. I can speak French and German, and two or three dialects, and I think I am rather smart at that kind of thing. I can

sing, too, and I am desperately fond of music. If I were poor I should like to be a musician—I mean a paid musician. As I am rich I shall be an amateur of the best sort. I glory in using my voice; although, of course, I am still considered too young to have it trained.

‘When first Aunt Bridget died I was very miserable; but I have naturally a cheerful disposition, and she would not have liked me to weep and cry, so I tried to get the better of my grief. Now I am here. Uncle Stephen has arranged that I am to stay for a year. I felt so surprised, so amazed, when I got his letter; for, do you know, Miss Jeffries, I did not know I had got an uncle Stephen. Aunt Bridget had never told me about him. I thought she was my only relation. It was because her affairs were placed in the hands of an English lawyer that it was discovered that I was the niece of dear Uncle Stephen. Then he wrote—oh, such a kind letter!—and here I am.

‘You see,’ continued Shirley—and now she held out her pretty hand—‘I can’t help being different from you, Julia; I was not brought up the same way, and I have seen so much of the world. And, oh, I have been so lonely!’ Her lovely eyes filled with tears. She looked down for a minute, then glanced up with the old roguish, half-defiant expression. ‘And I could never be a prim, good little English girl, so there’s no use trying it.’

‘Who would wish it, dear?’ said Aunt Hannah.—‘You, I am sure, Julia, least of all.’

‘I am glad Shirley has told me her story,’ said Julia then; ‘it makes things easier.’

Then she got up, and bending towards Shirley, kissed her.

‘We are to be sisters, little coz?’ said Shirley.

‘If you like,’ said Julia.

‘That is good; that is capital!’ said Aunt Hannah.

She felt inclined to clap her hands, but restrained herself.

‘And now, Shirley,’ said the old lady, ‘I wish to tell you something about Julia. You must expect Julia to have her difficulties with regard to you, just the same as you have your difficulties with regard to her. You are quite different from any other girl she has ever seen. You are, my dear—I admit it—a very charming young girl, but your ideas are foreign, whereas hers are essentially manufactured at home. The things you think nothing of would very likely shock my Julia; and, above all things, it rather hurts her feelings—oh! I don’t say that she is right—but it rather hurts her when you, a new-comer, suddenly absorb *all* the attentions of her father and mother. I leave this matter to your taste, Shirley. If you have tact—which I am certain you have—you will know how far you can go. You are anxious to win love, and I rather fancy you are the sort of girl to whom love is very freely given. But, my dear, you must know the amount of love which is due to you—not the love that is Julia’s—that is hers by birthright.’

‘Oh, am I taking away your love?’ said Shirley in an amazed voice. ‘I didn’t think about the loving part; I wanted to make them happy. They are so nice, so sweet, so fascinating! They are

unlike any people I ever met before. Who else would be so good to a little strange girl, and even take in her pets and make a fuss over them? Oh, don't tell me I am not to love them!

'Of course you are to love them,' said Julia.

'Of course, Shirley; you are quite sensible enough to understand what I mean,' said Aunt Hannah.

Just at that juncture Mr Cairns called out to Shirley to come and sing to him. She went to the piano at once, and trilled out several songs in her rich, full young voice. It was the sweetest, most mellow voice that Miss Jeffries had ever listened to. Instinctively she caught Julia's hand and wrung it hard. Suddenly she bent forward and whispered to her:

'She is very lovable, very sweet. You are in luck, Julie; she will do you good.'

'Oh! don't praise her overmuch,' cried Julia. 'I acknowledge — oh! I acknowledge her wonderful charm.'

Shirley ended by singing a few Mexican songs in the native tongue. This, metaphorically speaking, brought down the house. Even Julia was fain to clap her hands, whereas Aunt Hannah paced up and down in her enjoyment.

'Bravo! bravo!' she said when the young voice ceased. 'Now then, let us join in that chorus. Dear me! I feel that I am young and on horse-back again, galloping, galloping, galloping over the plain. How splendidly you do it! And the accompaniment has the exact thud, thud of the horses' feet.'

Shirley laughed.

‘We must get you some very good singing-lessons,’ said her aunt. ‘You will be a splendid singer by-and-by.’

‘What about Julia’s singing-lessons?’ said Aunt Hannah. ‘She has a very nice voice too—a sort of contralto. I should imagine those two girls would sing beautifully together.’

‘I don’t think I want any singing-lessons just at present,’ said Julia in her prim voice. ‘Some people don’t approve of bringing out the voice too young. I am only fifteen.’

‘And I am a year older,’ said Shirley.

On the whole the evening was a success. Compared to the previous evening, it was a great success. Aunt Hannah felt quite cheered as she went to bed.

‘I did right to come,’ she said to herself. ‘She is a very fascinating young creature. And as to poor little Julia—well, it will do the child good. She has never yet had to rough it in any way. The curious manner in which my sister and her husband have given themselves over to that girl is quite enough to try the sweetest temper.’

When Aunt Hannah awoke in the morning she felt that a little further conversation with Julia, a hint or two dropped to her sister, a word spoken in Mr Cairns’s private ear, would effect all that would be required of her, and she might be permitted to go back to her farm and her animals in peace and comfort.

But as she was dressing she happened to look into the back-yard, on which her north room

looked. There she saw a cart coming in piled up with luggage.

‘Who in the name of wonder is coming now?’ thought the old lady.

As she looked she heard a gay voice, and she saw a girl dart across the yard. The girl was in a pale-blue cotton frock, and her reddy-brown hair was streaming round her shoulders.

‘My trunks! my trunks! My dresses! my dresses!’ she cried.

Aunt Hannah put her head out of the window.

‘How do you do, Shirley?’

‘How do you do, Miss Jeffries?’

‘Call me Aunt Hannah, child.’

‘Oh, I am so glad!’ said Shirley. ‘Dear Aunt Hannah!’

‘You don’t mean to tell me, child,’ continued Miss Jeffries, shouting loudly, ‘that all those trunks are yours?’

‘Of course they are, Aunt Hannah. They contain my treasures—the darlings of my life.’

‘Clothes of vanity?’

‘Perhaps so; clothes of vanity. I love—I adore pretty dresses.’

‘Well, so do I, for that matter,’ said the old lady. ‘I don’t wear them, for it isn’t suitable to bedizen an old body. But I like dress, particularly if it is bizarre and queer. Have you got a South American dress?’

‘I’ve got a Mexican dress all complete, beads, feathers, and all.’

‘My word!’ said Aunt Hannah, ‘it will be entertaining to see the contents of those trunks.’

'I'll appear in a different dress at each meal to-day,' said Shirley. 'Oh, what fun—what fun!'

'I am coming down into the garden, child. Meet me there, like a good little soul.'

Shirley said something hastily to a man who was standing by. It was to the effect that her trunks were to be conveyed into the house and up into her own bedroom. It was a large bedroom—for most of the rooms at The Grange were roomy and comfortable—but seven very large trunks would crowd up the most spacious apartment. Shirley, however, thought nothing of that.

By-and-by she joined Aunt Hannah on the sunny lawn.

'Oh! it is sweet of you to let me call you Aunt Hannah.'

'I want you and Julia to come and spend the day after to-morrow with me,' said Miss Jeffries.

'Are you not going to stay here for a bit? You don't know what a difference you made last night.'

'I can't possibly stay. It is selfish of you even to ask it. My animals, my poor people, my fruit, my bees, all need me.'

'Of course they do. I forgot about that. Will you forgive me?'

'Certainly I will. Is this really your first experience of English life?'

'Not quite. Once I stayed with an old lady, who was no relation of mine, for six months by the seaside. Oh, it was *triste, triste!*'

'Then you think you will like this better?'

'This better!' cried Shirley. 'Why, it is lovely. You see, I am with my own people. Uncle Stephen

is my own; the same blood flows in our veins. We both loved my darling mother, although I can scarcely remember her. And then Aunt Charity is so delightful; and you, Aunt Hannah.'

'I am no relation, child.'

'Nor is Aunt Charity. But I think our hearts are really related; don't you?'

'Dear child, perhaps so. But what about Julie? What about your little cousin, Shirley?'

'I could love her tremendously if she would let me.'

'She is jealous of you, Shirley. Your coming here has upset her ideas.'

'I know. What can I do to help her?'

'You say you want your uncle and aunt to love you. Try to make Julia love you. You have gained their love; the love of Julia is yet to be obtained. It will be a precious possession when it is yours. It will stand storm and stress; it will help you in more ways than I can explain. Try to win it.'

'I want to; but how?'

'Let your own heart tell you. Do the things you think Julia would like. Sometimes be even a little dull for her sake. Suggest that she should go with her father and mother, that her interests should be thought of before yours. There are a thousand ways. She is a particularly straight little soul—nothing crooked or deceitful about her—nothing that any one could not really esteem in her character. But she is beside herself now. It seems to her that a beautiful little bird with gay plumage has darted into her home nest and upset

the heads of the parent birds. You are a bright little tropical bird, Shirley, and she is a little brown English dove. But the English dove has her own special charm; don't forget that.'

'Of course—of course. How good you are to speak to me like this! I will try and think what is best to be done.'

By-and-by Shirley left the old lady and went into the house. It was very nearly breakfast-time. She longed to have a few minutes to explore the contents of the trunks. She had no time, however. Prayers were announced; Mr Cairns read devotions; then breakfast followed.

After breakfast Shirley could contain herself no longer.

'Aunt Charity, my trunks have come. Uncle Stephen, all my darling, wonderful possessions—my curiosities, my eggs, my shells—every sort and kind of thing is waiting to be stared at and admired and loved upstairs. I want to unpack. Oh, there are my exquisite clothes! I got a lot in Paris just before Aunt Bridget died. Oh dear, I am so excited! Who will come and see me unpack? Will you, Julia? Do—do!'

'I can't possibly,' said Julia in her prim voice. 'I always think unpacking trunks very dull. And then I have my duties to attend to.—Father, when would you like to have the *Times* leaders read to you? You missed them yesterday, you know; you will lose the thread, father.'

'Oh, not to-day, I think, Julia,' said her father in an almost timid voice, glancing at Shirley as he spoke. 'I really am *very* much interested in

the eggs and Southern things that your cousin has spoken of.—If you would have them brought downstairs on trays, Shirley, after they are carefully unpacked, I can examine and classify them. We must get up a little sort of museum. I have always longed for such a thing, and your collection shall be the nucleus. What do you say, my dear?’

‘I say,’ remarked Shirley, ‘that I will show them to you when Julia has read the *Times*, for I must unpack my frocks first.—Aunt Charity, will you come and see my frocks unpacked?’

‘I wish I could, darling; I’d love to; but after the *Times* is read, Julia likes to read French with me for half-an-hour.’

‘Then I won’t take anybody up to my room except Aunt Hannah. Come, Aunt Hannah—come.’

The girl danced up to the old lady, slipped her hand through her arm, and led her from the room.

CHAPTER VI.

FINE CLOTHES.



THE rest of the day passed more or less on wings. Aunt Hannah spent such an interesting morning in Shirley's room that she forgot the very existence of time. She and Shirley had the apartment quite to themselves; for Shirley, determined not to fail in her act of self-denial, locked the door and kept every one out.

‘Presently, when you have attended to your ordinary duties,’ she said to Julia, whose knock came to the door during the course of the morning.

‘Father says he is quite ready to see the feathers and the shells now if you like.’

‘Please tell Uncle Stephen that I have not begun to unpack my curiosities yet; I am busy over my clothes.’

Julia went away well pleased. At lunch-time a quaint little bird of gay plumage appeared in the midst of the home nest. Shirley, with Aunt Hannah to help her, had put on one of the Mexican dresses. It was curious how the deep, deep blue, the gorgeous yellow, the dazzle of the tinsel, suited her vivacious face. Even her red hair seemed to mingle with the gay colours she had fastened round her throat.

The servants stared in astonishment. Julia said in her heart of hearts that she did not like it; but Mr and Mrs Cairns were very pleased. Mr Cairns had to learn the history of the dress, the beads, the feathers; how they were worn, and when. Then he wanted to know if Shirley had learnt any of the marvellous Mexican dances; and when she said she had, and would give an exhibition in the evening in the regulation sandals, he almost clapped his hands in glee. But Shirley was determined that Uncle Stephen, much as she loved him, should not praise her overmuch.

‘I tell you what it is,’ she said; ‘let us have either a contrast to-night, or let Julia also wear one of my pretty dresses.—What do you say, Julia?’

‘But have you anything likely to suit the child?’ said Mrs Cairns, stretching out her hand to her little daughter and drawing Julia to her side.

‘Oh yes, but I’m not going to tell you beforehand.—Whisper, Julia.’

Julia bent down, and Shirley said something in her ear.

‘You would like it, wouldn’t you?’

Julia nodded, and a delicate colour rose to her pale cheeks.

‘I only wish I could stay to see the whole thing,’ said Aunt Hannah.

‘And why can’t you, Hannah? I am sure a little rest from the worries of your home life will do you good,’ said her sister.

‘Worries of my home life!’ replied the irate old lady. ‘If you call it a worry to do what I

like best, to make a lot of people happy, and to be wanted—— Have I not my darling farm, and my animals, and fruit and vegetables to look after? You know me very little, although you are own sister to me, Charity.'

'I forgot for the moment, or I would not have said the words,' said Mrs Cairns, with a smile.— 'Very well, Shirley,' she added, 'we will have an exhibition to-night. You two girls shall entertain the old people. I am sure it will be great fun. We might have a repetition of the entertainment a week hence, and I will then ask some of your friends, Julia. You have long wanted to ask the Ffrenches here, and the Dalgennys. We might send them an invitation to-day; and then we might have Tom, the village fiddler, to play for you both.'

'Oh, please, not for my Mexican dance. I will play the tambourine myself as I dance. May I?'

'That would be quite charming,' said Mr Cairns; 'and if you sing for us afterwards, Shirley, we shall have quite a delightful entertainment.'

'Only there is one thing,' said Shirley; 'Julia must entertain just as much as I.—What can you do, Julia?'

'Nothing,' said Julia, resuming her prim manner. 'I have never entertained in my life. I think,' she added, 'that it is rather unmaidenly in such a young girl.'

'Well, I am a year older, so I suppose you won't object to my making things spin,' said Shirley.

Mr Cairns laughed at her words, but Julia's face looked primmer and more severe than ever. After a pause she said slowly:

‘I will wear the dress to-night, and if I can help you in any little way when the Ffrenches and the Dalgennys come I shall be pleased, but I don’t wish to make a public exhibition.—I think, mother, I am right; am I not?’

‘No, Julia; you are as wrong as possible,’ said Aunt Hannah. ‘I don’t wish to see girls pushed out of their lawful position, but at the same time you ought not to leave all the entertaining to your cousin.’

‘I can manage if she objects,’ said Shirley, whose patience was fast giving way.

‘Well,’ said Mr Cairns, ‘we will leave the matter to be discussed later on. The most important thing is this: do you wish your young friends invited? If so, we will start making arrangements.’

‘I think,’ said Mrs Cairns at that juncture, ‘that the whole of the entertainment ought not to rest on Shirley’s shoulders. Dear Julia is right. She has never done anything of the kind before. We have brought her up, as you know, Stephen, to be very exclusive. Our object was to have a modest, retiring little daughter.—Shirley, we admit your charm, my dear, but you are differently educated.’

‘I am,’ said Shirley with emphasis.

‘Therefore, if it is agreeable to you, you shall do what you think well for our entertainment; but, in addition, we will have a magic-lantern, and the fiddler to play dances in case you young people like to have a dance in the big ballroom.’

‘Yes, mother, that would be best,’ said Julia,

and as she spoke she rose and went deliberately away.

The strangest feelings were filling her breast.

‘If father and mother were not there I could just adore Shirley,’ was the thought that filled her heart.

But they were there, and so was Aunt Hannah, and to have a lot of elderly people absolutely crooning with pleasure over her young cousin was more than poor Julia could stand.

‘Nevertheless, I will try—I will try,’ she said to herself. ‘Oh dear, oh dear, how strange the world is!’

She went up the avenue farther than she intended. Now, the avenue at The Grange was long, and was divided at intervals by gates. There were in all three gates, and at each gate was a lodge. Julia had just reached the first of these gates when she saw a girl coming to meet her. She knew the girl very well; her name was Honora Ffrench. Honora was seventeen years of age, a dark-eyed, bright, vivacious girl. She had always rather in her heart of hearts approved of Julia; and Julia in her heart of hearts had always admired Honora immensely. There had never been any chance of envious or passionate feelings being aroused with regard to Honora Ffrench. Honora visited The Grange but seldom. When she did come Julia liked her. She was dashing, spirited, and very handsome, and quite a lady in her manners. Julia used to wish that if she had been differently made she might have been produced on Honora Ffrench’s model. She

hailed her now with a little cry of delight. Honora was just the person whom Julia would most like to talk with.

‘Are you coming to see us?’ she cried. ‘I am so glad!’

‘Well, I was,’ said Honora; ‘but it is great luck to meet you, Julie, for I am in such a horrible hurry, and also in such a horrible hole, that I want to get back as quickly as possible. I wonder if you could help me. Can you?’

‘What is it? What can I do?’ said Julia. ‘I’m sure I’d do anything in my power if possible.’

‘It’s just this. We were giving the school children their annual entertainment. It was to take place to-night. Poor little things! they have been so looking forward to it; and now it is knocked on the head absolutely and completely—that is, unless we can patch up some amusement for them all in a hurry. I know, Julia, that you don’t greatly care to exert yourself in matters of this sort, but the facts are these. Forty-five children are to present themselves in the large girls’ schoolroom this evening, and our entertainer, Mr Fry, has telegraphed to say that he has sprained his leg so badly that he cannot come. It happened this morning or he would have tried to get a substitute. As it is he can do nothing.’

‘But can’t you put it off till to-morrow?’

‘No, indeed; that’s just it. The milk is ordered, and is, I believe, waiting in great cans in the schoolroom; and the cakes and buns and sandwiches and fruit are all there likewise. The materials

for the feast will be ruined. We simply can't afford to postpone it; we must do something. I was thinking of round games—blind-man's buff and the like. Can you come and help us? Do say yes, for I must rush off to the Dalgennys, the Fords, and the Fremantles. We must get all the girls we can.'

'I would help you if I could,' said Julia; 'but you know I am very little good at that sort of thing. Besides, we have a kind of entertainment at home to-night.'

'An entertainment at your house?'

'Oh, quite a private thing.'

'But is it anything that would be useful to us? Do speak, Julia. You are quite an old friend; you might help a body in an hour of need.'

'I'm not sure,' said Julia; 'you mightn't like it. I have a cousin staying with me. She is half a foreigner. She has some quaint ideas; she wants us to do something to entertain father and mother to-night.'

'Why, that's the very thing. Can she dance or do anything of that sort?'

'She can, but I don't think she would.'

'I didn't mean to go up to the house,' said Honora after a pause, 'but I think I'd better see this girl. She may save me a lot. Let us go at once and find her. I am sure if she is the least bit inclined to oblige she will do what we want.'

'Indeed, I don't think so; and she is not a bit the sort of girl you require.'

'How queer you look, Julia! Do allow me to

judge. I really am beside myself. Think of the cakes and pies all wasting, and the milk turning sour, and the poor little children all agog for their fun and pleasure. She will put her pride in her pocket, won't she, and do a Christian deed? Oh dear, I must—I will see her!’

‘As you please,’ said Julia in a constrained voice. ‘But don't blame me if you don't like the thing afterwards.’

‘Blame you! Why, of course not, you little duck. I am very much obliged to you. It's providential that I came here. I am convinced your cousin will do what we require.’

The girls walked rapidly down the avenue. Julia disliked the turn of events immensely. She was struggling to become more friendly with Shirley, but that her special friend—her greatest friend—should be in imminent danger of falling a victim to the charms of the enemy was more than the little girl could bear with equanimity.

They had very nearly reached the house when Julia suddenly laid her hand on Honora's arm.

‘Honor, I want to say something.’

‘Well, what is it, Julia?’

‘You won't—you won't’——

‘What is it, dear?’

‘You won't love her better than me?’

‘Oh, you little Jealousy! As if I could! Why, Julie, you are my very greatest friend; there is no one at all to compare to you, in my opinion. I like your sweet little mousy ways, and your dear little pursed-up mouth, and your sweet brown

eyes. Give me a kiss, old girl. Oh, is it jealousy that makes you so unwilling to allow your friend to help us? I look for greater things than ever.'

'You will admire her, of course,' said Julia; 'everybody does. She has taking manners, and I know she will be delighted to come, for she hasn't a scrap of shyness in her; and—oh, there she is!'

Shirley was as usual playing on the lawn, and as usual her animals surrounded her. She had removed her Mexican dress and was once again in flowing white. Her hat had tumbled off, and her wonderful hair was in a tousled mass all over her head.

'Is that the girl? Why, she is quite a beauty,' said Honora.

'Try to look at her calmly. She isn't so wonderful after all,' said Julia.

When Shirley saw the two girls she called out:

'They're just more bewitching than ever, Julie. And as to Mordecai, he is beside himself with excitement over Aunt Hannah. I said to him this morning, "Isn't she a charming old lady?" I said it twenty times over, and, do you know, the moment he saw her just now he shouted in her ears, "Isn't she a charming old lady?" Oh, what fun this is!'

'May I introduce you to my friend, Honora French?' said Julia.—'Honor, this is Shirley Kendal.'

Shirley looked at the new-comer, gave a frank smile, and held out her hand.

'How do you do?' she said. 'Is it the English way to shake hands the moment you are intro-

duced? It is the Mexican way, and I always do it.'

'You are very kind, I am sure,' said Honora.—
'Julia, please tell your cousin what we want, for I must be off; I have so much to attend to.'

'It is this,' said Julia. 'Honora is in trouble. There is a school feast to take place at six o'clock this evening, and the person who was to entertain has failed at the last moment. Honora wants all the girls she can to help her. She thinks perhaps that you and I could.'

'Why, of course,' said Shirley, her eyes sparkling. 'Anything, I am sure. What shall we do?'

'What can you do, Miss Kendal? That is the thing.'

'Would a Mexican dance do? And a shawl dance afterwards? And a little performance which must be kept secret between Julia and myself? And then may I sing some Mexican songs, and a few Irish ballads? If there had been longer time we might have got up a variety entertainment, but will that do? I mean, will it be better than nothing?'

The sparkling eyes of the speaker, the rich colour in her cheeks, the lovely voice, the graceful figure, all produced their usual effect.

'Do!' cried Honora. 'Why, it is splendid; it is grand.—Oh Julia, how can I ever thank you enough? Tell Miss Kendal exactly when you are to be at the school.—Do anything, Miss Kendal, that you think best—anything—and the freshness, the charm, of it will go down. Oh, I am relieved! This is twenty times better than Mr Fry's enter-

tainment. It's quite a lucky thing that he did sprain his foot. Poor man! of course I am sorry for him, but this is just twenty times better.'

Honora scarcely waited to say another word, but turned rapidly on her heel and absolutely ran down the avenue.

Shirley looked for a moment first at her pets and then at Julia.

'Don't you like my doing it?' she said in a wistful tone.

'Yes and no. I hate public exhibitions.'

'But to make the school children happy'——

'Well, we have promised, and we must go through with it,' said Julia; 'but I have not the least idea what I have to do.'

'As soon as ever darling Aunt Hannah has gone I will come up to your room and explain,' said Shirley.

For answer Julia walked across the lawn and seated herself in the hammock. Shirley took no further notice. She began to play with her pets. Aunt Hannah, basket on arm, appeared. The parrot shrieked at her, 'Isn't she a charming old lady?' Then he bent his head as though to invite that rubbing of her forefinger that he particularly liked. Aunt Hannah stood over the cage and played with the bird, while the two healthy kittens sprang on her back, and Mops barked round her feet. The mother cat sat in the middle of the sunny part of the lawn and diligently washed herself.

'I suppose this is all very sylvan and interesting,' said Julia to herself, 'but I only wish that matters were as they were a week ago. At this time of day all was peaceful. I had done my

French with mother, and had read the *Times* leaders to father, and I felt so nice and well-informed, and so pleased that I should have long holidays from my usual work, so that I could really acquire those wider things which mean the best education. And as a rule I'd have a book or paper in my lap; and sometimes I'd read, and sometimes do a little of my embroidery; and sometimes perhaps I would doze, and then tea would be brought out on the lawn, and father and mother and I would enjoy it, and we'd look forward to a tranquil evening. But now—ever since this girl came the fuss has been almost unendurable. I wonder if I shall ever enjoy life again. Oh, to think of to-night—to have to exhibit ourselves in public! It is intolerable.'

Aunt Hannah went up to Julia.

'Julia darling,' she said, 'you and Shirley are coming to spend the day after to-morrow with me. Don't forget. Be with me early. I hope I shall hear a good report. Good-bye, Julie. You are quite comfortable now, aren't you?'

'Oh yes,' said Julia in a perfunctory tone.

'Be sure you try to keep your temper. You don't know how happy you will feel if you can manage to deny yourself,' said Aunt Hannah.

She looked affectionately at her goddaughter, and then she went up to Shirley.

'Walk with me a bit of the way, Shirley,' she said.

Shirley whistled to her dog, and the cats also followed them up the avenue. Mordecai shouted after the party, 'Isn't she a charming old lady?'

Then he turned and fixed his attention on Julia. He had learned other expressions before he came to The Grange. Julia evidently interested him. He put his head first on one side and then on the other. He looked hard at the little girl, and then he called out:

‘Green with jealousy! Green with jealousy!’ in a loud, shrieking voice.

‘Hateful bird!’ thought Julia. ‘I can’t even lie in my dear old hammock without being insulted.’

She crossed the lawn and went to the window where her mother was sitting.

‘Well, Julie?’ said her parent.

‘Yes, mother.’

‘Things are all right now, aren’t they, darling? Aunt Hannah has gone away full of hope.’

‘I am sorry Aunt Hannah is gone, but I am disappointed in her all the same,’ said Julia. ‘Mother, what do you think? Honora has been here. She is in great trouble on account of the school feast.’

‘What about it? I sent the strawberries in good time, and your aunt Hannah has sent two large pailfuls of gooseberries.’

‘No, no, mother; it isn’t the food. That, of course, is all right. It’s the fact that a certain Mr Fry cannot entertain the children. So Shirley and I are to take his place.’

‘You and Shirley?’ said Mrs Cairns. ‘What does this mean?’

‘It’s all settled, mother. We can’t get out of it. Shirley, of course, is delighted. And I am to help her.’

Mrs Cairns smiled. 'I expect it will be extremely good,' she said. 'Your father and I had better walk down and see what the proceedings are.'

'I wonder, mother, you like me to do these public things.'

'My darling, I don't think entertaining a few little children anything very public. Ah! here comes Shirley. And here comes the tea-equipage. —Put it down there, Henry—just there.—Now, Julia, will you pour out?'

Mr Cairns appeared. Mrs Cairns wrapped a light shawl round her shoulders. Shirley flung herself on the grass. The parrot entertained himself by calling out, 'Green with jealousy!' whenever he looked at Julia, till Shirley had to take him into the house.

At last tea came to an end.

'Julia,' said her cousin.

She held out her hand to Julia, who walked away with her with as good a grace as she could manage, and they went upstairs to Shirley's room.

CHAPTER VII.

THE EASTERN PRINCESS.



SHIRLEY'S room was in great disorder, but it also looked wonderfully picturesque. To one who had never been abroad it might almost have appeared as though you had stepped across the threshold into a sort of enchanted land, so marvellous and rich was the colouring, so strange the shape of the different garments, so rich the piles of beads and necklets and bracelets and head-ornaments.

'What a queer, untidy room!' was Julia's first remark.

'Is it? Oh, some one must put it tidy for me; I never could, you know.'

'But mother likes us to keep our rooms tidy,' said Julia, who was delighted to have anything to find fault with.

'Well, never mind that now,' said Shirley. 'The thing is to prepare for to-night. I thought of wearing this; do you see?'

She took up a dazzling robe of blue and yellow, and held it before herself in front of the large mirror.

'There is always a certain difficulty about me,' she said, 'on account of my red hair. Now, you

would look gorgeous in red; you are so sweet and pale and delicately coloured. What do you say to this?’

Shirley poked her hand under a lot of soft silken garments, and pulled forth a trailing robe of crimson.

‘This is your colour,’ she said; ‘and you could wear this silver belt and these silver earrings. You could manage them quite well. You see, they fasten with a spring. And these two silver arrows in your hair. We should have to put up your hair just for the occasion. What do you think? You would be a sort of foil to me. At first I thought you would look lovely in pale blue and silver, but I think the crimson and silver for this special occasion will be the best. Then we must have special lights, and footlights if possible. Do you think your friend Honora will have footlights?’

‘We generally have a row of candles with chimneys over them in front of the stage,’ said Julia. ‘But really, Shirley, this is becoming more and more theatrical. Do you think father and mother will like’——

‘Your father and mother do like. See these sandals? You must wear them on your feet. Are they not wonderfully embroidered? Oh! and this little embroidered jacket, mostly silver. You won’t know yourself.’

‘The dress certainly is pretty,’ said Julia, entering with effort into the spirit of the thing. ‘But when I have it on, am I to stand before the audience and just—just grin?’

‘No, indeed; you are to bow to me. I will do most of the acting. You are just to stand before me and bow. I am to be an Eastern princess, and you are to be a princess from another State who has come to ask me a favour. Or rather, let us reverse it; that would be best of all. You shall be the great Eastern princess, and I’ll be the princess from a distant part, and I will come to you for a very great favour. I will kneel to you. I will do it all in pantomime; I will scarcely say a word. I must take your hand; and when I have done, and all the people are delighted, I will kiss your hand. Then I will rise and dance before everybody one of those exquisite Mexican dances, and I will play my own music with my little tambourine. Oh, you don’t know how sweet it will look!’

‘But surely you can’t dance in that long dress?’

‘Oh yes, I shall manage it. All Mexican girls dance like that. Now then, you see how very easy your part is.’

‘It seems to me I’m to be a dressed-up doll and do nothing.’

‘You will enter into the spirit of the thing, Julia; you must act a part. You must look haughty. Just think how terribly you dislike me, and the expression of your face will be perfect.’

‘Why do you say that?’ said Julia, colouring.

‘Ah, Julie, I know it! You can’t conceal your little opinions; you are frankness and sincerity itself.’

‘I think you are unkind, and—and not correct,’ she added.

The moment she had said the latter words her conscience pricked her. She knew she was not speaking the truth.

Shirley hastily gave some other directions, and presently the two girls lost all feeling of enmity in the enthralling moment of fitting and arranging their different garments.

About six o'clock they went downstairs apparelled in such a fashion that Mr Cairns absolutely declared he did not know them. After all, Julia's dress was wonderfully becoming to her. Her mouse-coloured hair was very thick and extremely long, and Shirley had insisted on plaiting it, and had plaited in at the same time all sorts of tinsel and long bows of different-coloured ribbons; and some of the tinsel and some of the ribbon were arranged in a coronet over her low forehead. She had never looked so pretty. The unwonted excitement had brought colour to her cheeks; her lips were smiling. She absolutely enjoyed herself. The bright crimson robe fell away from her young figure, revealing a petticoat of a richly embroidered cream satin. A belt of heavy silver clasped her small waist tightly. She had a silver bodice beneath her crimson robe, and silver embroidery fastened here and there on her dress.

Shirley in her many colours looked almost like a gorgeous peacock; but each colour was put on with a due eye to effect, and nothing was sacrificed to the glory of her hair, which gleamed and shone and glittered like living gold round her brow and about her shoulders.

The carriage was waiting, and the two girls drove off to the school-house. It was really only a stone's-throw away, but Mrs Cairns feared that they would look too remarkable in their present dress walking down the avenue.

Honora, all excitement, was waiting to receive them by the back entrance. They were got in and put away for safety, as Shirley expressed it, in a sort of little greenroom. Presently they went on the stage, for Shirley had a few directions to give.

'Footlights here,' she said; 'a bright light in that corner. You must make my hair shine; and Julia—yes, her silver ornaments must gleam and glisten. Now, Julia, you as Queen must stand there, and I as your suppliant face you. I lay my tambourine on the floor, and my fan I use as a Spaniard would use hers. Now then, I think all is ready.'

The children, the teachers, and the different people, including Mr and Mrs Cairns, who had come to view the school feast, were all waiting in their seats. A signal was given, and the curtains slowly parted and were drawn up to the roof. There was a shout of applause. The sight which the children looked at was as unexpected as it was novel. Julia, unconsciously, had seized the propitious moment. She had thrown herself into the most becoming attitude. She held her sceptre lightly in her hand; the arrangement round her head looked exactly like a crown. Shirley came forward, and with the cleverest pantomime, got even the youngest scholar in the

room to understand that she was begging for something, and Julia on her part was refusing to give it.

‘It is!’ ‘It isn’t!’ ‘Yes, it is!’ said more than one excited child to her neighbour. ‘It is our own Miss Julie. And who is t’other?’

‘Never did I see any one so beautiful as t’other,’ said a big boy whose own hair was somewhat carrotty.

‘Hush, hush, children!’ came from the teachers near by, and again all were absorbed in watching the stage.

Julia, having entered into her part, liked it better and better each moment. What queer feeling was glowing at her heart? What sort of thrill was rising within her? She never knew she had these feelings. The desire to do well possessed her. Shirley should not have all the credit. She felt that she too was a success; that her soft brown eyes and pale hair looked nearly as well as Shirley’s dark eyes and brilliant hair. People looked at her and praised her. Why should she not make them praise her and admire her more and more? If she won a victory over Shirley, then indeed she felt she could forgive her. It would be a new experience.

The few minutes that the two girls had faced the audience flew like a flash, so busy were Julia’s thoughts, so determined were the motives which were rising in her heart. Yes, she would succeed. There were things in life besides reading *Times* leaders and French books with her father and mother. There were things in life besides the

dull routine of homely tasks; and these other things, they did cause the heart to beat, they did cause the nerves to tingle, they did give pleasure—yes, yes, pleasure.

Shirley, far more accustomed to excitement than Julia, was not so much overcome. She acted her part with some skill and grace, and when the moment came when Julia was supposed to yield and allow her hand to be kissed, Julia herself gave a different turn to the situation. She raised her hand high as Shirley was about to kiss it, and held it above her head, waving to Shirley to go; and turning her back on the audience, she walked to the other side of the stage. Her motive and action were unexpected, and just for an instant they disconcerted her cousin. But Shirley, quick as thought, availed herself of Julia's unlooked-for refusal. She fell on her knees—nay more, just for an instant she grovelled on the ground. The spectators cried, 'Shame! shame!' But Julia held her ground. Shirley came up to her at once, but Julia was not going to change her own programme. She waved to Shirley to withdraw, and Shirley stepped a few paces away, putting on a look of despair.

Suddenly she flew to her tambourine and began a marvellous Mexican dance. The people almost held their breath as they watched her, so wonderful was the grace of the supple young figure. Her movements were extraordinarily fleet and unexpected. The dance came to a sudden end, and she fell again at Julia's feet. Still Julia would not be persuaded.

Then Shirley sang. With the aid of the tambourine as an accompaniment, she sang a Mexican song in the Mexican language. The audience were delighted. If Mr and Mrs Cairns had been pleased the night before, how much more pleased were they now! The furore and clapping that ensued was deafening.

When all was over Shirley again bent towards Julia; and now Julia, caprice having ceased, changed her tactics. She raised her sceptre and, as though she were a real queen of the East, laid it lightly on Shirley's head. It was a signal that Shirley had gained her request. The children were as excited as though the whole story had been written out for them.

Julia now received her full meed of applause. She did yield; she was therefore their own Miss Julia, their own young lady. They were prouder of her even than of Shirley. The curtain went down amidst shouts and shouts of delight.

When it rose again Shirley was prepared in quite a different guise to give them pleasure. She had torn off her Eastern dress, and now wore the simple garb of an Irish peasant girl. She sang a few peasant songs in so sweet and melting a fashion that people very nearly cried. Julia was persuaded to go on and play one or two marches, but her brief delight in her own acting had departed, and this second entertainment was scarcely a success. Shirley, however, had saved the situation. All went well until the end of the feast.

By-and-by Shirley, again dressed as an Eastern

princess, came out and helped the children to their cakes and strawberries and cream. She kissed them and laughed with them, and made the youngest one sit on her shoulder. In short, she carried their little hearts by storm. Yes, the entertainment in the school-house was a success.

As the girls and Mr and Mrs Cairns went home together, Mr Cairns laid his hand on Julia's shoulder.

'Why, Julia,' he said, 'I didn't know you to-night.'

'Nor did I know myself, father.'

'You acted splendidly.—Didn't she, Shirley?'

'She has a great gift,' said Shirley, looking with approval and affection at her cousin.

'No, I haven't,' said Julia; 'and I don't want to act. I liked it just for a time, but afterwards I felt it was wrong. A great many people don't approve of acting.'

'The whole entertainment was most innocent and charming,' said Mr Cairns. 'Julia, my dear child, there is one thing I must beg, and that is that you don't allow yourself to become narrow-minded. Take pattern by your cousin. See how life has served her. Surely you can't disapprove of anything your cousin does.'

Julia did not like to express her thoughts.

They had reached home by this time, and as both girls were tired, they were glad to retire to bed early.

The next morning Shirley awoke with the dawn. She felt restless and uneasy. When she opened her eyes her cousin's name was on her lips.

‘What shall I do?’ thought Shirley. ‘Whatever I may do or say or try, she won’t like me. It is really extremely painful. Perhaps I oughtn’t to stay here. Oh, it is delightful in this dear, lovely English home! She doesn’t know how lonely I’ve been. She thinks my life has been one picnic. That’s all she can tell. She is envious of me. It is terrible.—Oh Mordecai!’

Shirley burst into a fit of laughter.

‘You bad, bad parrot! Why did you revive that wicked little phrase, “Green with jealousy”? I know, you terrible bird, that you’ll say it now whenever you see Julia. What is to be done?’

Shirley lay and thought. She was a girl with plenty of charm, also with many faults. Her temper, sweet on most occasions, was capable of being fiercely roused at times. She knew well that there was a limit to her endurance of Julia’s cold and unkind behaviour. As she lay in bed now she trembled. That Mexican blood in her veins must not be lightly roused or terrible things might ensue.

‘I will try to propitiate her. I will do my very best for a few days longer,’ thought the girl. ‘If at the end of that time she is still as antagonistic to me as she is at present, I will ask dear Uncle Stephen to send me away, for I can’t trust myself. It is terrible, but I can’t. Her acting last night was splendid, but it was underbred. Yes, yes, there is no other word for it. She had no right, just before every one else, to leave me in the lurch. We had arranged our play. We had arranged just what to do. She

turned round. It was quite good acting, because it was not acting at all; it was really her own feelings. But it was unfair to me, and now I daren't even tell her. What a strange way she has been brought up! She doesn't know what ordinary girls know. I should have thought she at least, with her English parentage, would know what honour means. She was not even honourable last night.'

Shirley jumped up.

'In my country when one wanted to please another one gave a gift. A gift was meant for propitiation. What gift can I give to Julia?' thought the girl.

She began to look about her still disorderly room.

'I suppose I must put things tidy in some way to-day,' she said. 'I must tell Heron where she can put everything. I have never had a maid before, but Aunt Charity said that Heron was to help me as well as Julia. She is a very nice woman; she is not unreasonable. No one in this house is unreasonable except Julia herself.'

Shirley began rapidly to dress. It was not yet six o'clock. In Julia's opinion, one of her cousin's most unpleasant ways was her power of getting up early. She felt that there was no getting rid of her.

'I might get up early and have an hour or two without her, but even that privilege she denies me. She is always about, always winning approval. She is detestable.'

Shirley, having dressed, looked through her

treasures. There was one thing which perhaps might please Julia. It was a locket of most rare device. It had been bought for the young girl by her aunt Bridget. It was a Viennese filigree work, blue enamel underneath and most delicate tracery of gold above. The little locket was attached to a narrow gold and turquoise chain. The present had cost a great deal, and Shirley had loved it. The turquoise blue suited her complexion and her red hair. She laid it tenderly against her cheek.

‘It will suit Julia too,’ she said to herself. ‘It is very, very pretty. Perhaps she will know when I give it to her that I do want to love her and to have her love me.’

The case in which the locket and chain was placed was almost as pretty in its way as the gem itself. It was made in the form of a little casket, and was inlaid with deep-blue enamel and delicate pink. It shut with a little gold key, which was fastened to a very narrow chain outside.

Shirley examined her treasure carefully.

‘Of all my possessions, except the things that belonged to mother, I value this the most,’ she thought. ‘Shall I offer it at the shrine of possible friendship? I needn’t do it, of course. She may be angry, or, on the other hand, it may win her heart. Is it worth the heart? That is the question.’

Shirley looked thoughtfully out of the window.

‘A heart is worth a great deal,’ she said to herself—‘a heart to love me—the heart of a girl to love me. It is strange how much I want it.

All old people care for me—all old men and old women—middle-aged people too; but had I ever a real girl friend? There was poor Agnita, but she died. She loved me very much. I held her hand the night she went out. She called it going out. But then she was half-Mexican, and that was a long, long time ago; and I have never, never had a real friend since Agnita died. I should like to. I should like Julia to be my friend. Yes, I should like it. It is worth losing you, darling, if I win her.'

So Shirley, taking some paper from her writing-case, sprawled a few words in her irregular writing: 'For Julia—from Shirley.' That was all. She could not attempt to say more. If Julia understood, all would be well. If Julia failed—utterly failed—to understand, why, then she was hopeless.

Shirley, having made up her parcel, waited anxiously until Julia had left her room. Then taking the treasure, which she had carefully tied up in soft paper and secured with white satin ribbon, she laid it on Julia's dressing-table. Then she went downstairs, trembling a good deal. It had really cost a tremendous effort to part with the lovely locket and chain, and almost as much to part with the little casket which contained it; but having done so, her heart felt light. Julia would love her; she would know that Shirley meant well.

CHAPTER VIII.

WAR TO THE KNIFE.



WHEN Julia went up to her room after breakfast she saw the casket lying on her dressing-table. Heron was in the room.

‘I think that parcel must be from Miss Shirley, miss,’ she said. ‘I am sure that is her handwriting. Shall I put it away for you, miss, or will you open it at once?’

‘Leave it alone, Heron. I don’t think I want you just at present,’ said Julia. ‘Oh yes, by the way, I want you to fold up that dress I wore last night—the crimson dress with the silver embroidery—and take it back to Miss Shirley’s room. If she happens to be there, say I am very much obliged to her.’

‘But Miss Shirley said yesterday that she hoped you would accept it; she says she has such a lot of others. She said, “I have more than I can ever wear out, and I hope Miss Julia will keep this dress; it becomes her so well.”’

‘I could not think of such a thing,’ said Julia, with some haughtiness.

Heron, who had already folded up the pretty dress, lifted it from a shelf and left the room.

As soon as Julia was alone, she took up the little parcel and looked at the handwriting.

‘For Julia—from Shirley,’ she read.

‘If she begins making me presents, that is the last straw,’ thought Julia. ‘Does she think I am poor and that I need them? Oh, this is unbearable!’

When she unwrapped the parcel, the pretty casket gave her an involuntary thrill of pleasure. She unclasped it and took out the wonderfully pretty locket with its lovely chain. Just for an instant the desire to possess so charming a trinket did assail her with strong temptation. She even slipped it round her neck. It reposed on the white muslin blouse she was wearing, and made her look prettier than she had ever seen herself before. The blue of the turquoise seemed to set off her fair complexion; it seemed to reflect a new brilliancy in the soft brown eyes. She gave a quick sigh.

‘Not to be thought of!’ she said to herself; and then she put the locket into the casket, slipped the casket into her drawer, and ran downstairs.

Shirley was on the lawn as usual playing with her pets. She looked up anxiously when Julia appeared. Julia said in a tone more agreeable than usual:

‘What shall we do this morning?’

‘Oh, anything you like, Julia.’

‘But I want to do what you please. You are my guest.’

‘You please me by pleasing yourself. You do really. You forget that I am a stranger. I have never before been in a truly English family.’

When I was with Aunt Bridget she was as much foreign as I am myself; and during the six months I spent at the seaside I never felt really at home. I am at home here—that is, if you will have it so.'

'Of course I will have it so, Shirley. Why in the world are you always posing? You can't think how unpleasant it is to me. I will have it so. This is your home; you are my cousin—my first cousin. Father is devoted to you, and so is mother. If you would just take me without a fuss, and without—yes, I must say it—always posing, I could be quite tolerably happy. Of course, I may as well say frankly that it is a trial to me having any other girl in the house. You would feel the same if you had grown up to be fifteen years of age without having a sister of any sort.'

'I grew up to be sixteen years of age without having a sister,' said Shirley in a sad voice. 'It is true there was Agnita, but she died.'

'Who was Agnita?' said Julia, who could be very curious on occasions.

'Oh, a girl half-Mexican, half-English. She was beautiful and graceful, and her heart was warm—very warm—and she loved me.'

Shirley's eyes filled with tears. She turned away.

'More and more posing,' thought Julia.

'Well,' she said after a pause, 'you want to know exactly how I am accustomed to living. And if you will do just what I do, we shall get along very well, no doubt. You cannot expect me to fall in love with you at once, for that

is not an English girl's way. But I am quite willing to be just and fair. Would you like me to tell you just how I spend the day?'

'Indeed, indeed I would. Let us go to that bower over there, and let us talk.'

Shirley slipped her hand through Julia's arm. Her face was full of eagerness.

'Why should we go to the bower?' said Julia. 'That is so—so old-fashioned—girls sitting in bowers. There's this seat under the oak-tree; we shall be in the shade.'

'But the bower is in the sunshine; I want the sun,' said Shirley.

'Nonsense, Shirley! We shall spoil our complexions. I could not think of such a thing.'

Shirley made no further remark, but when they got into the cool shade of the oak-tree she shivered slightly. Julia took no notice.

'The true aim in life of a well-bred English girl is to leave the world better than when she entered it,' began Julia.

'Goodness! How dull!' said Shirley.

'You oughtn't to say that, Shirley. You must be a person without any religious feelings, and with no principle.'

'I don't know; I can't be sure. Agnita liked me, and father loved me. I don't think I ever willingly hurt any one in my life.'

'Oh, that is because you are naturally good-natured. Now, the right thing is to do good on principle. That is the way I have been trained. Of course, these are the holidays. When the holidays are over every moment is occupied. But

we have six weeks more, for they have only just begun. I always make a point of taking up one special study for the holidays. I am working at French now. Mother is a most superb French scholar, and I am doing some of the old French as well as that of the present-day. Do you know anything of French, Shirley?’

‘I can speak it; that’s about all,’ said Shirley.

‘Well, that’s something, you silly child.’

‘Is it?’

‘I wish I could speak it,’ continued Julia. ‘I can after a fashion, but rather haltingly.’

‘Well, shall we speak it together? I spoke French entirely for two or three years of my life, and my accent was thought good.’

‘We’ll speak it for an hour a day religiously,’ said Julia; ‘and you shall read French with mother and me. That will be very nice.’

‘Yes,’ said Shirley, ‘that will be very nice.’

‘Then I study current events—such things as are going on in Parliament, and matters of that sort.’

‘That must be dull.’

‘No, it isn’t. You ought to know what is happening if you wish to be really intelligent; and of course you must be interested in the history of your own country, and foreign countries also. At first, while you are getting under way, so to speak, you will find it dull; but afterwards—oh, you’ll enjoy it.’

Shirley yawned. ‘We never did that sort of thing abroad,’ she said; ‘but I suppose I must.’

‘Indeed you must if you are to be a companion

to me. I never talk what people call "frivol." I make up my mind when I meet a companion to thrash out a certain subject with her, to get her views and to air my own. I can't tell you how much one learns in that way.'

'Are you a blue-stocking?' asked Shirley.

'What's that?'

'A person who knows more than anybody else, and is always aggressively bringing it forward.'

'I don't know so much more than others, but I think for my age I am very well-informed,' said Julia primly. 'As to a blue-stocking, that is quite an obsolete term. In these days girls are thought nothing of unless they are well-informed.'

'I suppose so,' said Shirley drearily. After a pause she added, 'I think that foreign life must be pleasanter than the life you people lead in England. We enjoy ourselves more. I suppose it is because of the sunshine. We are always gay. If we have great sorrow we weep, but soon we are laughing again. We sing in the sunshine; we forget the cold and dismal days. When we meet we love each other. We think a great deal about love. We love and we hate.'

'Oh, how dreadful to hate!' said Julia.

'Well, we do hate. Mexicans hate cordially. They're as good at hating as at loving. Now, I think I have a very warm heart, but I have within me the power of hating too. I have when roused a very fiery temper.'

'Have you?' said Julia. 'I should rather think you had. I judge that from your appearance.'

‘You have tried me, Julia; do you mean to go on trying me in the future?’

‘I hope not. If you will agree to my scheme, and allow me to plan out our days, I think I should make things very nice for us both.’

‘You would, I hope,’ said Shirley, ‘allow me plenty of time to work at my music; I love that. You haven’t heard my guitar yet; I haven’t unpacked it. I play the violin too, and the viola. I have the power of managing almost every instrument I touch. Then, as to my singing—well, of course, all Mexicans can sing; there’s nothing in that. You don’t mind, do you?’

‘Certainly not. I have very little taste for music myself, but I judge that it appeals very forcibly to people.’

Just at that moment Mr Cairns came out and called Julia. She flew to his side, and Shirley sat on under the tree. After a time she roused herself and walked across the grass. She chose the warmest part, just where the sun was shining down with intense power, and seated herself there. She took off her hat and fuzzed out her red hair, and allowed the full rays of the sun to warm her.

‘It is not only my body, it is my heart that is chilled,’ she said to herself. ‘But of course she can’t have got the casket yet. She hasn’t said a single word about it. She can’t have got it yet.’

Julia and her father disappeared into the house. Shirley played with her animals and forgot her disagreeable interview with Julia. She wondered what they would do at Aunt Hannah’s the next day.

By-and-by she went up to her room to prepare for lunch. The first thing she saw was the crimson dress with the silver ornaments lying neatly folded on the top of one of her chests of drawers. While she was looking at it Heron knocked at the door. She came in looking apologetic and even scared.

‘I have brought you hot water, Miss Kendal. And Miss Julia has returned the dress with many thanks.’

‘But didn’t you tell her I meant her to keep it? I thought you had best tell her. She may often want it, and it suited her so well.’

‘It did suit her beautiful, miss.’

‘Then will you take it back to her with—with my love’——

Shirley’s lips trembled.

‘I told her, miss, that you would like her to keep it, but she’s rather shy about receiving gifts; and she—she asked me to bring this back, miss.’

Heron quite coloured as she laid the little casket on the table. It was folded up just as it had been when Shirley had taken it to Julia’s room. Shirley felt herself turning ghastly white. There was a fierce clutch of intense pain at her heart. Heron, who noticed the swift change of colour, went out of the room muttering to herself.

‘Miss Julia ain’t a bit what I’d expect a nice, kind-hearted young lady to be,’ she said to herself. ‘That poor, pretty, generous young creature—it’s a shame to take her gifts like that.’

Meanwhile Shirley stood a few feet away from the little casket with the locket in it. After a

time she came near and took it up. Inside was a tiny scrap of paper, and on it was written:

‘Thank you very much, Shirley, but I don’t take presents. English girls are not in the habit of taking presents of value from girls they scarcely know.’

‘Horrid creature!’ said Shirley.

She took the scrap of paper and tore it into a thousand bits; then she opened her wardrobe and banged the casket within, so that it might hide itself in the farthest corner; and then, her lips and hands still trembling, she tidied her hair a trifle and went downstairs. It was a very fierce-looking young madam who stepped into her seat at that luncheon-table. She did not even glance at Julia. It was war to the knife now between them. Shirley would cease to propitiate; she would show the other side of her very complex character.

‘Julia has spurned my love; she shall learn to dread my hate,’ thought the angry girl.

CHAPTER IX.

SHIRLEY LEADS THE FASHION.



JULIA was not gifted with a great deal of penetration of character. She had lived too remote, too guarded, a life to have much acquaintance with the world. She did not observe, therefore, Shirley's changed attitude towards her. Shirley was outwardly quite polite. Indeed, she was perhaps a little more polite than formerly. She did not show irritation or give herself away in the very least in Julia's presence. She was very gentle and agreeable and obliging to Mr and Mrs Cairns. The day she spent with Aunt Hannah was also one to be pleasantly remembered. Julia felt that Shirley was improving; she did not go into wild raptures over Aunt Hannah's hillside garden, nor over her animals, nor even over her poor people. She said she liked everything, but her liking was of a subdued order. Aunt Hannah noticed a great change in the girl. In her opinion the change was a disastrous one, but she did not make any comment when Julia said:

‘I think Shirley is getting tamed at last. She must perceive for herself that our ways are not her ways, and that it is quite impossible for her to continue any longer the wild hoyden she was

when she arrived. I am glad, Aunt Hannah,' continued Julia, 'that Shirley is coming to her senses; I shall be able to live with her now.'

'I do not think the change an improvement,' was Aunt Hannah's comment, and she said the words shortly.

Julia gazed at her in some amazement and turned away.

It was soon afterwards that at dinner-time Julia noticed a curious new fact in regard to her cousin. Shirley dressed with extravagant gaiety. She was so beautiful in herself, so elegantly made, so graceful, that almost any dress became her. But the quieter, the more sober and dove-like, were Julia's garments, so the more ragingly brilliant were Shirley's. She never appeared twice in the same costume. Her dress almost partook of the barbaric, and yet there was no reason to find absolute fault with it. If she chose to wear open-work embroidered stockings and dazzlingly pretty little coloured shoes, no one could say that they did not become her. And the deep blue, tawny orange, and rows of beads of every colour and grade made her fair face, her white throat, and her brilliant red hair look all the more lovely by contrast. Then, again, she would be in white silk, with the softest sapphire blue; or, again, in turquoise blue, or pale, pale gold. Whatever she wore was lovely, and wherever she went she threw every one else into the shade.

By slow degrees the other girls of the neighbourhood heard of this marvellous Shirley Kendal, and came to see her. She took great pains when they

did so, making herself agreeable, and they all went away more or less in love with her. Their remarks on these occasions to Julia were invariably:

‘Well, Julie, you are in luck! Isn’t she quite too charming? And, oh, those dresses!’

Amongst those who most clung to Shirley was Julia’s own special friend, Honora Ffrench. Honora came now almost daily to The Grange. She hardly noticed Julia. It was with Shirley she walked. Shirley and she paced the lawn side by side. Soon it came to pass that they walked arm-in-arm. Then Honora, an impulsive girl enough, but hitherto rather reticent with regard to her affections, was seen to lay her head on Shirley’s neck, and Shirley stooped and kissed her.

When Julia saw this she ran like a mad thing into the house, banged the door of her room and locked it, and burst into tears. But if Shirley noticed the tears she made no comment; nor did her apparent devotion to Honora decrease in the least.

Honora and a few other girls of the little community soon asked Shirley if they might copy her dresses. And now whole parties would arrive in the morning, and the large parlour, called the Blue Parlour, not very far from the residence of Shirley’s pets, was devoted to dressmaking and cutting-out. Julia was invited to join, but she said she did not admire Shirley’s style of dress, and would prefer not to imitate it. She thought the others would notice this, and perhaps comment upon her aloofness, and even implore her with

wistfulness to join them. But the girls, occupied so much in themselves, did not take the least notice. After all, compared to Shirley, Julia was a very dull person.

Shirley quite delighted them. She got them to sing the choruses of her songs. She told them story after story about Mexico and South America in general. They roared with delight; they even cried with emotion as she described her experiences. Oh, what a girl she was! What a delight to have her taking part in their somewhat dismal life! She made all things fresh and pleasant and new to them. She was so clever, too, at needle-work; and soon in church on Sunday the change in the quality of the girls' dresses became manifest. Gay colours became the fashion. Royal blue more or less became the rage; so also did sapphire; so also did turquoise. Delicate shades of pink and red were impossible to Shirley on account of her hair; but she was quite generous, and advised those girls who had dark or fair hair to adopt those colours. They thought her wonderfully good about it, and followed her magnetic touch in all things.

Soon the girls in the Sunday-school thought it well to have red or purple or blue in their hats. Aunt Hannah remarked once to her sister that the whole country was changed on account of Shirley.

'Julia doesn't look well,' said Aunt Hannah on this occasion.

'No,' said Mrs Cairns. 'I can't think what is the matter with her, for certainly Shirley is as

nice as possible. She never does anything to annoy her; on the contrary, she tries to please her; but the poor darling seems to have taken a violent dislike to her. I can't understand it.'

'Well now, Charity,' said Aunt Hannah, 'I have one piece of advice to give.'

'And what is that, dear?'

'That you just lie by; that you take not the slightest notice. Those two girls are having a pretty big fight, I guess, at this time. If you don't interfere they'll fight it out to the bitter end, and be the best of friends afterwards. Julia is learning a lesson which will hold her in good stead for the remainder of her life. Don't interfere.'

'But she looks ill.'

'No; she is only wanting in vitality compared to that vigorous young creature, who would carry Julia along with her on the giddy stream of fun and innocent pleasure if only my good god-daughter would let herself go. Take my advice; don't interfere.'

Mrs Cairns decided that she would not interfere—that is, as long as Julia kept her health.

In the beginning of September there was a complete break-up of the family at The Grange. Mr and Mrs Cairns and Julia and Shirley went to the English Lakes for a month. Julia and Shirley on this occasion were thrown a good deal together, but nothing important occurred. Shirley seemed dull and not greatly interested. She said openly that she preferred The Grange to the Lake Country. She also said that she had seen so

much magnificent scenery in her life that she was not deeply impressed by the beauty of Derwentwater and Ambleside.

At the end of the month they came back. It was autumn, and Shirley's spirits were once again keen and vigorous.

On the day after her return she was much pleased at receiving a letter. She read it once, twice, and then she looked at her uncle and aunt with dancing eyes.

'You are so good to me!' she said. 'Never was a girl treated so well. And now I wonder—I do wonder'——

'What is it, Shirley?' said her uncle. 'When you look at me with that expressive glance, my darling, I know that you have a great favour to ask me.'

'So I have. A girl is in England; she has been all over the world. Her name is Patty Jervis. I don't know really what special nationality she is—perhaps English. Anyhow, she is charming, and she is—she is in England.'

'Yes, Shirley?' said her aunt.

'Don't forget, mother,' here hastily interposed Julia, 'that our lessons begin in real earnest on Monday. Miss Munro is coming back, and the other professors will also arrive.'

'How many professors are there?' asked Shirley, glancing at her cousin, and putting on that slightly guarded manner which always characterised her.

'Professor Hudson for music,' said Julia; 'Professor Winter for singing. And then there is

Fräulein Bourne for German, and Mademoiselle La Croix for French. You see, we have our governess and four professors. We have a lesson from each of the professors every week, as well as our own lessons.'

'And does Miss Munro live in the house?' asked Shirley.

'Certainly. She has a nice bedroom near our schoolroom.—Mother, oughtn't we to be putting things in order? We generally do a good deal of that sort of work before Miss Munro arrives.'

'The schoolroom has been painted and papered while we were away,' said Mrs Cairns. 'You can see to the rearranging of the furniture, of course, Julia; and Shirley will perhaps help you.'

'I think Julia had better arrange the furniture as she likes it,' said Shirley.

'Perhaps I had,' said Julia, pleased at this compliance on Shirley's part. 'You see, I know what Miss Munro likes; she is a little difficult to please.'

'Oh, I shall please her fast enough,' said Shirley. Then she added, turning eagerly to her uncle and aunt, 'But you haven't granted my request.'

'My dear child, you haven't asked anything.'

'It is this. May Patty Jervis come to stay here for a few weeks—perhaps even a month? She would so like it, and it would make me so happy! I am a little lonely sometimes—sometimes—you understand.'

The whole sweet, captivating face grew wistful; the eyes glowed—tears were not very far away.

Had this request been made by Julia just at

the beginning of the term, there would have been an absolute refusal on the part of Mr and Mrs Cairns. But then Julia could never look like Shirley. Her heart might be breaking, but she could not put that expression into her eyes, nor that pleading into her voice, nor adopt that pretty attitude.

‘You must tell us something about your friend. Is she’——

‘Oh, you want a description? You shall have it at once. She is dark—very dark; her eyes flash when she is angry. She is rather tall, too, and very spirited. She is a jolly sort—very jolly—and she made me happy when I was miserable. I never absolutely loved any girl but Agnita. Ah, well! she is dead. But I like Patty, and I want to see her most particularly. May she come? If not for a month, even for three weeks, or a fortnight, or a week—oh, or even for a day or two. May she—may she come?’

‘Mother never lets me invite visitors in lesson-time,’ interrupted Julia.

‘But you and I are not the same, Julia. We were not brought up the same. I have had a great deal of variety in my life. The life here is small—very small—by comparison.’

‘Your uncle and I will think it over, Shirley,’ said Mrs Cairns, rising. ‘But, first of all, tell us how old your friend is.’

‘She is just my age—just sixteen.’

‘Would she join in your lessons?’

‘I dare say she would come and listen,’ said Shirley, with a smile; ‘but as to learning—well, of course, she knows French and German just

as well as a native. For that matter,' continued Shirley, 'so do I.'

Julia fidgeted restlessly. 'Mother,' she said after a pause, 'is there any necessity for Shirley to join my lessons in foreign languages, as she knows them already?'

'I was thinking that myself,' said Shirley in a demure voice.

'We'll see about all that next week. And your uncle and I will let you know at lunch-time whether you may invite your friend or not.'

Shirley said nothing more. She went away presently to attend to her own amusements. She and Julia, without a single word of open quarrel having taken place between them, now had absolutely different interests. Shirley spent a great deal of time idling with her pets. The kittens, now grown into small cats, still delighted her. She taught Mordecai more and more saucy speeches; she initiated Mops into stranger and stranger tricks. Julia never took any notice of Shirley's pets.

The day was a somewhat boisterous one. The fine weather had suddenly changed. The lawns, so pleasant in the summer, were strewn with autumn leaves. Shirley shivered as she crossed them. She went into the pleasant parlour called the South Parlour, and sat down with her books and work surrounding her. Mops lay at her feet, the cats made themselves comfortable on different parts of her dress, and Mordecai called her a bad girl at stated intervals and with the precision of one letting off rockets.

Julia, who had come into the room for a few minutes, went to seek her mother.

‘Mother,’ she said, ‘what have you decided with regard to that girl?’

‘Patty Jervis?’ said her mother in a cheerful tone. ‘Well, I suppose we must let her come.’

‘If she were my friend you wouldn’t let her come in lesson-time,’ objected Julia.

‘Julia, my darling, you must try to learn that there is a great difference between you and Shirley.’

‘I have learnt it, mother,’ said Julia in a sad voice. ‘I have been learning it ever since she came. But this seems to me to be the last straw. It hurts me, mother, very much.’

‘Why should it hurt you, my dearest? Your father and I would not willingly hurt you for all the world.’

‘I don’t know, mother, but you do hurt me. Shirley hurts me morning, noon, and night. Now, if her special friend comes I shall be truly miserable.’

‘Well, have a friend of your own, Julia. Why not? You and Shirley don’t seem to hit it off. We are terribly sorry, for nothing will induce us to part with Shirley, as she is your father’s own niece. But suppose you had a great friend of your own.’

‘She’d go over to Shirley; I know she would.’

‘Not if you want to keep her.’

‘My greatest friend used to be Honora Ffrench, but she has gone altogether over to Shirley’s side.’

‘Now, what do you say to having your little friend, Lily Bell? She is always devoted to you. She is a little younger, too. I heard from her mother a few days ago. The child is not well; a visit here would do her good. As to lessons, she need only take just what Miss Munro thinks right.’

‘Lily Bell would be better than no one,’ said Julia, her eyes brightening.

She remembered this little girl who used to cling to her and be almost troublesome in her affection.

CHAPTER X.

NEW ARRIVALS.



ON the following Monday three events of special significance occurred. Miss Munro, Julia's governess, who was henceforth to be also Shirley's governess, arrived. By the same train, and in the same carriage, came also Patty Jervis and Lily Bell. They all entered the house together, and Mr and Mrs Cairns and the two girls were in the hall waiting to greet them.

Miss Munro had lived with the Cairnses for two or three years. She was a good-looking, quiet young lady of about eight or nine and twenty years of age. She was highly accomplished, and had a somewhat prim manner. She adored Julia; and Julia now rushed to her, clasped her arms round her neck, and gave her a hasty kiss, and then turned just in time to receive Lily Bell's frantic embrace.

Lily Bell was a shy girl of about thirteen years of age. She was small for her years, with pretty, soft dark eyes, dark curling hair, and a very trim little figure. She had always loved Julia, ever since they met at the seaside a few years ago.

'Oh Julie, Julie!' she said, 'here I am, and it is

just sweet of you to ask me. Oh, I am so happy at the thought of spending a few days with you!’

Julia looked gratified. She turned to see if Shirley and her friend were noticing. Lily had slipped her hand through Julia’s arm, and was standing clinging up very tightly to her side, now and then gazing on her face with adoring glances from her soft brown eyes.

‘It would be nice,’ thought Julia, ‘if Shirley should see this—Shirley, who as a rule captivates every one.’

But Shirley was nowhere in sight.

‘Why, mother,’ cried Julia, ‘where is Shirley? And where—where is Patty Jervis?’

‘Shirley behaved like a young whirlwind,’ said Mr Cairns, with a smile. ‘She caught that very dark, stolid-looking girl in a fierce embrace and whirled her out of the hall. We will leave them alone for the present, Julia. You have your own dear little friend, Lily Bell; let Shirley keep hers.’

‘I will go to my room,’ said Miss Munro. ‘Yes, thank you, Mrs Cairns, I had a very pleasant holiday, and have come back quite ready for work.—Julia darling, you look rather pale. I hope you have had a good time.’

Julia’s reply was to raise a pair of miserable eyes to her governess’s strong, good-tempered, firm face. She did not say anything; neither did Miss Munro press her again.

‘I shall join you at tea,’ she said to Mrs Cairns, and then she went slowly upstairs to her own part of the house.

‘Come, Lily,’ said Julia, ‘Do you want to take

off your things this instant minute, or would you rather come with me to the South Parlour? I rather guess we shall have it to ourselves.'

'Oh, let me go with you, Julie; I have so much to say! It is so delicious to be on a real visit to The Grange! I used to fancy, Julie,' continued the little girl—'I used to long and fancy all about this delicious minute. I felt sure that some day you would ask me, and then I should be the happiest of the happy.'

'I'm glad you have come, Lily,' said Julia, 'for I want a companion.'

'Do you, with that tall, splendid girl—I just caught a glimpse of her—the girl with the red hair? Why, what is the matter, Julia?'

They had reached the South Parlour, and Julia flung it open with some violence. Sitting in the midst of the animals were Shirley and her friend Patty Jervis. They were holding each other's hands and talking volubly. Mordecai was out of his cage, and was perching on Shirley's shoulder. From there he was making decided advances to Patty, who stroked his smooth head at intervals.

Julia looked in; her brow darkened.

'Even here she supplants me,' she thought to herself; then she banged the door with violence and turned to frightened little Lily.

'Why, what is it, Julia? What is the matter?'

'*She's* there. We'll go to the nursery. Heron generally keeps a fire there for all sorts of odds and ends of matters. She's sure to have one to-day, for it's rather cold. Come along, Lily—quick, quick! I want to speak to you.'

Lily trudged up the winding stairs with her friend. The nursery was quite cosy. It was now turned into the workroom, where Heron spent all her leisure minutes. She was sitting by the window, turning a white muslin dress of Julia's.

'Heron,' said Julia, 'may we, just as a very great treat, have this room to ourselves for half-an-hour? This is Miss Bell, Heron. I have often told you of my dear little friend, Lily Bell.'

Heron smiled and gathered up her work.

'I'll go downstairs to the housekeeper's room,' she said. 'You can have this room as long as you like, Miss Julia, dear.'

Then she dropped a curtsy to Lily Bell.

'I'm glad you have come, Miss Bell,' she said. 'I am sure it will be a great pleasure to my young lady to have your company.'

Lily suddenly looked shy and tongue-tied. Heron left the room.

'Now then,' said Julia, 'let's go and sit close to the old nursery fender. Let us fancy we are children again. I feel rather old, but you, of course, are a child in very truth. I am so glad to have you!'

'Oh, I am glad to come!' repeated Lily. 'But what is the matter, Julia? You don't look what you were.'

'I am going to confide in you. I know what I say will not be repeated.'

'Why, of course not,' said Lily, trembling with ecstasy at the thought of holding a confidence of her dear Julia's.

'It is this. You spoke to me about my de-

lightful companion, the girl with the red hair. I am going to tell you about her. She is not English at all—not really. I suppose she has some English blood in her veins, but her grandmother was Mexican, and she was brought up in Mexico. How it came to pass that my dear, prudent, careful father's sister could have married a man who was half-American, half-Mexican beats me. However, there it is.'

'Yes, there it is,' repeated Lily, who found some difficulty in following her friend.

'Well, Lily, she has come to live here, and she has about stolen everything in the world that I value.'

'Stolen!' said Lily in a shocked voice. 'Is she—can she be a thief?'

'In one sense, yes; in another, of course, no. She wouldn't take that pretty pin you are wearing in your coat, nor your little gold locket; but she'd think nothing at all of committing a much worse theft. She'd think nothing of stealing your love, or anybody else's love, and making it all her own, and getting you to feel desolate—oh, desolate! Now look here, Lily. I don't want to go into this matter, for I have done it so often, but what I wish to say is this—that if you go round to Shirley Kendal, you give me up, and I give you up. I shall be so terribly angry with you that I shall never speak to you again. I have brought you here because I want a friend. Will you be my friend?'

'I? Indeed—indeed I will!' said little Lily. Tears started to her eyes. She flung her arms

impetuously round Julia. 'Poor Julia—darling Julia,' she said, 'you may be quite, quite certain that nothing in all the world would make me give you up. You may be quite positive, for I love you better than any one else in the world except my own mother. Next to mother I love you. Oh, I am so proud and so pleased that I have been invited to The Grange!'

'Well, that is all right, Lily. Now we'll enter into a kind of compact. When Shirley talks honeyed words to you, you are clearly to understand that there is a sting behind them. And when she offers you presents—oh yes, she will go as far as that—it is awfully mean of her—you will have to refuse them. See you do. She does this by way of being generous, but it is all because she wishes to steal more hearts. You must beware of her.'

'You frighten me very much. Shall I be terribly afraid of her?'

'That's it; of course you won't. She has the softest voice, and the most mellow look in her eyes; and then, when she is singing—well, even I could find her singing good if I didn't know her for what she is. And, oh dear, dear! she has a way of twisting nearly every one round her little finger. Why, now, there's father and mother. They pretend they love me best, but they don't—not a bit of it. And there's Heron. I have seen her cry about Shirley. She really did once when I found it necessary to put down my foot. And then there's Aunt Hannah. I've told you about Aunt Hannah, the dear old lady

who lives in the house with the hill garden. She's as soft as anything whenever she talks of this blessed Shirley. And there's Honora—my own great friend, Honora Ffrench. I used to tell you about her.'

'Why, of course you did—the pretty, pretty girl with the golden hair.'

'Yes, the same. She thinks nothing at all of me now. It's all Shirley, Shirley, Shirley. So, Lily, if you want to keep in my good graces, and to do me, your own great friend, a good turn, you will keep away from Shirley. You will not talk to her; you will not allow her to influence you. There, now!'

'Thank you, Julia, for telling me,' said Lily. 'I'll be quite positively certain to do what you wish. I hate her already like anything. I can see quite plainly what you mean. She is a sort of siren, and a siren is always to be dreaded.'

'She is a siren—a most dangerous girl. Now let us talk of something else.'

When the party met for tea Julia's influence over Lily was quite marked. She squeezed into a seat next to her friend, and when Shirley spoke to her she pretended not to hear anything. She so considerably overdid her part that Julia was herself obliged to caution her.

'I quite understand, Lily, that you are going to be my most staunch little advocate, but you must not overdo it so that people will say that I have been talking to you. You must be polite, but not too polite. You must be pleasant, but not too pleasant. Whatever happens, you must

on no account give yourself away. It gives yourself away, Lily, when you refuse to answer Shirley when she speaks to you.'

'I found it very difficult to refuse,' said Lily in a trembling voice. 'The tone she used seemed to walk into my heart and pierce it, and I longed like anything to look at her; but, of course, I wouldn't. I see more than ever that she is a most dangerous sort of siren.'

'Well, cling to that belief, and don't give yourself away. At the same time, you must be polite.'

Meanwhile Shirley herself and Patty Jervis were having a long conversation. Before tea they had talked of Patty's own adventures, her future, her parents, what she had done since she and Shirley met. But now Shirley's curiosity was gratified, and she felt inclined to talk of herself.

'Well,' said Patty, 'how do you like living here? It must be a great change for you.'

'I should like it very well but for one thing, Patty.'

'One thing? What can it be that you specially dislike, except the dullness?'

'This one thing keeps the place from being dull,' was Shirley's remark, 'so perhaps I oughtn't to be so very discontented. It adds a sort of excitement and zest to life. It is the last thing in all the world you would suppose would happen in a slow sort of place like The Grange, but it has.'

'Do tell me; you rouse my curiosity like anything,' said Patty. She gave her friend's arm a squeeze as she spoke.

'Let us walk quickly, then, Patty, for this damp, boisterous weather makes me feel so cold. Well, here's the mischief; here's the screw loose; here's the thorn amongst the roses.'

'Yes, yes; do speak!'

'I have got an enemy—the bitterest enemy of the most inveterate type. I hate her like anything. Yes, I do. We both hate each other.'

'Well, I never heard Shirley Kendal say before that she had an enemy,' said Patty Jervis.

'I have, and her name is Julia Cairns.'

'What!' said Patty, in surprise. 'That demure, rather good-looking little girl?'

'That demure-looking little girl can be exceedingly unpleasant. She, of course, is the daughter of the house, and I did everything I could to propitiate her when first I came. I bore with her like an angel. I submitted to her whims, but she repelled me and annoyed me past enduring. Oh, there, there, Patty! Why need I go into the whole sordid, detestable story? It's war to the knife now between us.'

'But what can you do?'

'Apparently nothing, but yet in reality everything; for I have formed a league against her, and I am getting on splendidly.'

'You don't fight her openly?'

'Bless you, no, child! How could one do that in this beginning of the twentieth century? Of course not; the time is past for all that sort of thing. My *modus operandi* is far more unique and far more effectual.'

'But what is it, Shirley?'

'I will tell you. I steal all the hearts of her friends away from her.'

'Shirley!'

'Yes, my dear, I do; and I mean to go on doing it. I shall go on to the bitter end, until she comes to me and begs and begs on her bended knees that I shall give her back those she loves. Then I will do it. Yes, with my fairy wand they shall fly back to her like the returning tide of the sea, but not until then. Patty, my dear, you have got to help me. You have got to bring the haughty, cold, defiant little Julia to her knees.'

'It seems to me rather unkind, and I don't quite understand,' said Patty.

'Don't you? Well, you'll have to. I've brought you here to be in the plot. You watch her just for to-night, and tell me afterwards if you think I have any right to submit to her sort of treatment. Am I not her own first cousin? Why should she hate me? Why should she think that everything I do is done with a wrong motive? She shall sue yet for my favours, for I hold the sceptre of power.'

As Shirley spoke she drew herself up to her full beautiful height and looked with her lovely eyes into Patty's face. Patty returned her gaze.

Patty was a girl with an honest round face, a merry twinkle in her somewhat small black eyes, white teeth, somewhat thick lips, and a pug nose. She was not at all beautiful, for her complexion, in addition, was sallow and her figure a little thick-set. But there was a great deal of power

in that broad, low forehead, her voice had a nice trill about it, and her manner was gentle and pleasant. She was the sort of girl who would be a prop in a sudden emergency. She had a great deal of character, and Shirley, as she looked at her, now felt her heart beat with an agreeable sensation.

‘I know—I know quite well you will help me,’ she said.

‘I will, Shirley—I promise it—if you are in the right.’

‘Right or wrong, you will have to do it. I have been snubbed past endurance. I’m going to make that pretty little Miss Julia sit up; I can tell you so.’

‘Well, I shall look for myself and tell you what I really think.’

‘Do—do.’

‘And what about Miss Julia’s own little friend, Lily Bell? She seems devoted to her. She and I travelled in the same carriage. We made friends from the start, and she told me what an intensely happy life she expected to lead at The Grange. I thought it was on account of you, Shirley, but not a bit of it. She had never heard of you or your charms; it was all this blessed little Julia. She loved Julia so much; Julia was such a dear; Julia had been so very, very kind to her. There was no one in all the world like Julia Cairns. You won’t grudge Julia this one small adorer, will you, Shirley?’

‘Yes,’ said Shirley. ‘Lily Bell has to come round to me too. It is necessary. Oh, I’ll win

Julia before the end of the year, you will see; but in order to do so I must gather all the hearts—all of them. Then—then she will come to her senses.'

Patty shook her head.

'I'm not going to interfere,' she said, 'but I'm not at all certain that you are right.'

'I tell you what it is,' said Shirley; 'I feel vindictive. It's her own fault. She's got to be punished. Oh, one of those horrible showers is coming on; let's run into the house.'

The two girls rushed in before the rain caught them. They stood panting and laughing in one of the corridors. Then Shirley went into her pets' room, and Patty followed her. They did not talk any more about Julia. She by no means absorbed all Shirley's attention, for this young lady had many irons in the fire, and enjoyed her universal popularity more than words can tell.

In the evening Shirley came down even more ravishingly dressed than usual. Miss Munro looked at her with disapproving eyes. But this was only at the first glance. When Shirley spoke she looked again, and then she smiled; and then Shirley looked back at her, and Miss Munro smiled twice, and Shirley showed her lovely rows of pearly teeth.

By-and-by the governess and the young girl were chatting together as though they had been old friends. Julia noticed it. She bent fiercely towards Lily Bell and began to talk to her. Lily answered demurely, but notwithstanding her efforts she caught herself from time to time looking at

Shirley, who did not trouble herself to return Lily's glances. She was well aware that they were directed towards her, but the time had not yet come to secure poor Lily's little heart. At present Shirley was busy captivating Miss Munro. She also knew that she must rivet some of the chains which bound Patricia Jervis to her side. She was enjoying herself, and looking more brilliant and fascinating than usual.

Later in the evening, when Shirley sang, Lily felt herself trembling all over. She was seated next to Julia, but was perfectly longing to rush across the drawing-room and fling herself on the ground at Shirley's side and watch her as she opened her mouth and poured forth that liquid sound of delicious melody. But Julia had engaged her in a dull game of bezique, and she could not possibly move. She looked at Julia. She started, and a guilty expression came into her face. She became absolutely frightened, and her sweet, gentle, affectionate manner was now tinged with constraint.

Patty was the only girl in the room who was not acting a part. She was busy watching both Shirley and Julia, and was taking in their respective characters as only a girl of her nature and capabilities could. Patty was a far more sensible girl than either Julia or Shirley. She was distressed at the state of things, and wondered what she could do to set it right.

Presently Julia rose to her feet. She walked across the room just as Shirley was commencing one of her most celebrated Mexican hunting-songs.

Her pretty lips were forming themselves into the well-known words, when Julia said:

‘I am going to bed. I don’t know if any of you have remarked the fact, but that song when translated would not be allowed in any drawing-room. I know it, for I happened to read a translation of it in one of your books.—It is true, father,’ she added, turning to Mr Cairns and speaking with eagerness; ‘that chorus which you admire so much is nothing short of a Spanish curse.’

‘It is not,’ said Shirley, her face turning very white. ‘Why do you say it, Julia? You make a mistake.’

‘I am convinced of it. I will get the book and prove my words.’

Shirley sat still on the music-stool. Her face turned alternately white and crimson. Julia was absent a few minutes; then she returned with the book of Spanish ballads and hunting-songs, with their English translations at the opposite side of the page. Julia pointed to a song and looked up in triumph.

‘There!’ she said; ‘the Spanish hunter is calling upon his God and using a word which I know father would not like me to repeat.’

It was just then that Patty came forward.

‘You make a mistake,’ she said very gently, taking the book from Julia’s hand. ‘I happen to know Spanish just as well as Shirley does. This is the song she is singing; this is the chorus.’

She pointed to some perfectly suitable words. Shirley’s eyes danced with pleasure.



‘You ought to be sure of your facts, but I forgive you.’

‘You ought to be quite sure of your facts; but I forgive you,’ she said in her melodious voice, and turning quickly, she once again burst into the chorus.

It was all done so gaily, and with such apparent good-humour, that there was a storm of applause from every one in the room—all but Lily Bell and Julia herself. Lily stood with her hands clasped in front of her, a puzzled, bewildered look on her little, girlish face. Julia’s face was black with rage.

When the song came to an end Julia rushed from the room. Lily waited for a second.

‘May I follow her?’ she said in a timid voice to Mrs Cairns.

‘Certainly, dear,’ replied that lady. ‘Good-night, Lily.’

Lily kissed Mrs Cairns and left the room. When she was gone there was a moment’s silence. Shirley said in a nonchalant tone:

‘I’m sorry Julia made a mistake. You don’t suppose for a single moment, Uncle Stephen, that I would sing songs with dreadful hidden meanings?’

‘Oh no, dear,’ replied her uncle. ‘It was a natural mistake of Julia’s, for she does not understand a word of the language. But you took it very well, my dear.’

‘I hope I should not be guilty of losing my temper,’ said Shirley; ‘but Julia ought to be sure of her facts.’

‘I will speak to her to-morrow,’ said Mr Cairns. ‘Good-night, Shirley. Do you mind leaving that book behind you?’

Shirley laid the book on the table without a word.

When she and her friend went up to their own rooms, which happened to be close together, Patty said impulsively:

‘She really is insufferable. I will take your part as far as I think it right.’

CHAPTER XI.

LILY'S DEFECTION.



It was perhaps a good thing that lessons were now to begin in hot earnest. Shirley had something to think of besides her quarrel with Julia. Julia had to devote herself to the intricacies of French and German, of instrumental and vocal music, of what this professor and the other professor required of her. Her days, always planned out nicely and always replete with occupation, were now so busy that she scarcely had a minute to call her own. Miss Munro in her heart of hearts was secretly very glad of this. She was distressed at the attitude which her old pupil and her new pupil displayed towards each other. She hoped for a natural and happy ending of these untoward events, but not being in the very least in the secret, she was puzzled how to act.

Meanwhile Patty and Lily earnestly asked to be allowed to join the schoolroom party. Patty, with her knowledge of languages, still wished to study their literature, and was glad to get the advice of the very clever professors who came to teach at The Grange. Lily was a sad little ignoramus with regard to every subject, but she was bright, earnest, and intelligent, and took in Miss Munro's

remarks with keen pleasure. On the whole, four more lively or delightful pupils it would have been hard for any teacher to acquire.

There was apparently no ill-will while lessons were going on. Shirley, with her usual genius, scored points every day. But if she did take the palm for beauty and extreme intelligence, she also took the palm for chivalrous behaviour; for she always wished to allow her companions to precede her in the class, and to show them off to the best advantage. There seemed to be nothing to find fault with, and Lily's eyes would often fix themselves on Shirley's face with a feeling of admiration which, with all her efforts, she could not repress. But Shirley never noticed her. When Lily spoke Shirley hardly attended. She always said something polite when her attention was roused, but as a rule she scarcely glanced at the little girl.

One day they were all going for a long walk, but it so happened that Julia awoke with a bad cold, that Patty had a severe headache, that Miss Munro was obliged to go to the nearest town to buy some new school-books—in short, that no one was able to start forth on a fine, stimulating piece of exercise but Shirley and Lily. Lily wondered if she ought to go. Julia was lying on her bed dead-tired, and too sick and stupid to care much what happened to any one. Lily felt cold. She would so like to walk with Shirley. Even if Shirley did not speak to her, it would be pleasant to be able to glance into her face now and then.

Nothing whatever was said about the matter, but as two o'clock was the hour arranged, and as Shirley went upstairs apparently to put on her things, Lily thought that she might venture.

'I'll be sure to say nothing to make her like me,' said the little girl to herself; 'and if she talks of my dear, dearest Julie, I will be silent, or I will tell her just what is in my mind—that there is no one in all the world like Julie—and—and—— Oh, I won't do wrong. I'll just rush into Julia's room and ask her if I may go.'

Lily ran down the corridor, tapped at Julia's door, did not hear any reply, and opened it. Julia was lying, with a shawl wrapped over her, on the bed. There was a bright fire burning in the grate, for the day was decidedly cold. She raised a flushed face and looked full at Lily.

'What is it, Lil?' she said. 'I think you'd best not come and sit with me now; I don't want you to catch this horrid cold. Go out, dear, and amuse yourself.'

'Do you,' began Lily—'I mean, would you—would you greatly mind if I went for that walk with Shirley?'

'What walk, Lily dear?'

'To Neville Towers. It is two miles away, but indeed—indeed I should not be at all tired.'

'Oh, go by all means,' said Julia in a careless tone. 'Only leave me to myself now. Shut the door carefully after you. You are a good little thing, Lil, and I love you very much.'

'And I love you, darling Julia,' said little Lily; and then she went to her own room, and took

pleasure in putting on her prettiest crimson cloak and her dark-brown hat and muff.

She looked a sweet, taking little girl as she tripped downstairs and waited in the hall. There was no sign of Shirley anywhere. Lily looked up at the great clock. It wanted three minutes to two.

Presently Mrs Cairns appeared upon the scene.

'Why, Lily,' she said, 'what are you doing here? What is the matter?'

'Well, Mrs Cairns,' said Lily, 'you know that Julia is ill, and Patricia has a headache, and I thought I might go for a walk with Shirley.'

'Of course you may, darling. Where is Shirley?'

'Miss Kendal went out about five minutes ago, ma'am,' said Henry the footman, who also appeared on the scene. 'I think she went up the avenue.'

'Then run after her, Lily, as fast as ever your little feet can carry you,' said Mrs Cairns.

Lily obeyed; she ran and ran, but Shirley was a very quick walker, and Lily's running did not equal her rapid stride. Presently Lily in a panting voice called her name. Shirley heard it, and stopped at once for Lily to come up with her. She was dressed in a tight-fitting fur coat, and a little fur cap to match on the back of her brilliant head. The fresh air had brought a vivid colour into her cheeks; she looked as lovely as a picture.

'What is it, Lily?' she said, slightly frowning, as the child came up to her side.

'I thought,' said Lily, suddenly frightened in spite of herself—'I thought that perhaps—perhaps you'd let me go with you.'

'I'm really sorry, but I can't,' said Shirley at once. 'I am going to see Aunt Hannah.'

'Oh, but mightn't I come too? I should love it.'

'Really no, Lily—really no. I am not going to Neville Towers to-day. When we make up our party, of course, you shall come. Go back now and stay with your dearest Julia.'

Lily's eyes filled with slow tears. Shirley pretended not to notice them.

'By-bye, little un,' she said. 'Run round the garden if you want to keep warm. I'll be back in time for late dinner.'

She continued her walk, and Lily stood just where she had been left. She was greatly disappointed. It had cost her a considerable effort to make advances to Shirley—to ask Julia if she might go—and now Shirley herself had repulsed her.

'I don't know how anybody could like Shirley Kendal,' thought the little girl. 'I don't know how anybody can. I'm sure—I'm sure I just—just hate her.'

She turned slowly and walked towards the house. She looked a very forlorn and desolate little figure. But as she paced slowly the vision of Shirley's appearance—her brilliant face, her saucy manner, her slight air of defiance—captivated little Lily in spite of herself. She was a very human little girl, and she saw two pictures at that moment—one the gay and victorious Shirley, and the other poor Julia, depressed with cold, her face crimson with feverishness, her eyes sunk into her head. The one picture was ugly—yes, ugly—and the other splendid.

'I wish she'd love me,' thought Lily. 'It's very wrong of me to wish it when Julia is my real—real, own—own friend. But I do wish it—I do. I'd do a great deal for her. I don't really hate her. I can't help liking her. I wonder why Julia doesn't like her. She does everything so differently from every one else—her playing and her singing, the very tone of her voice, the very way she dresses. Oh, she is wonderful! If she were to kiss me—to kiss me as though she loved me—I could—I could adore her. It would be worth living for—it would be worth dying for,' thought the impulsive child.

She stayed in the garden and paced up and down. Presently she shed hot tears. They rolled down her cheeks and splashed on to her pretty brown muff. By-and-by a voice called to her. She turned abruptly and saw Patricia Jervis.

'Why, Lily, what are you doing?' called Patricia.

'I'm walking in the garden,' said Lily.

'You look rather dull.'

'I am dull,' replied Lily. 'Is your head any better?' she added, gazing at Patricia.

'Yes, thank you. I lay down for about an hour, and the pain has gone off. Suppose you and I do something, little one. You look awfully mopy.'

'I am,' said Lily. 'This is the first dull day I have spent at the darling Grange, but I am dull—very dull—to-day.'

'Well, you are dressed; let us go for a walk.'

'Oh, may we? I should enjoy it.'

'I thought you'd gone with Shirley. I asked

Mrs Cairns just now, and she said you ran after Shirley up the avenue. Didn't you find her?'

'Yes, Patty, I found her.'

'And why didn't you go with her?'

'She wouldn't let me, Patty.'

'Not let you? How very funny of Shirley. I am surprised.'

'Well, I'm not. I suppose I'm not good enough for her.'

'What nonsense, Lily! You are a little goose. Do you know that you are an awfully nice little girl? Shirley and I both think so.'

'Oh, do you, indeed? Patty,' Lily continued, 'perhaps it is wrong of me to say it, but I know you won't make mischief.'

'I never make mischief,' said Patty; 'rest assured of that. But if you'd rather not say *it*—whatever it is—don't.'

'Oh, but I must; I really must, Patty.'

'Well, child? Why, your voice is shaking.'

'Patty, Patty!'

'Yes, Lily—yes?'

'I—I love Shirley!'

'Oh Lily, how wrong of you!'

Patty looked full at the eager little girl, and then burst out laughing.

'I know she hates me,' continued Lily. 'She never takes one little scrap of notice of me. And I know, too, if I were to tell Julia, she'd—she'd—— But, oh! I oughtn't to say anything about that. I know I oughtn't to love Shirley, and I wish I could find a way of not loving her. She was awfully rough to me just now. She didn't

want to have me with her a bit; but, oh! I love her all the same. There's nothing in all the world I wouldn't do for her. What is it, Patty? Are you shocked at me?'

'I am neither shocked nor surprised,' said Patty. 'It's the way of Shirley; it's a gift she possesses; but, all the same, I am sorry.'

'Sorry?' cried Lily.

'Yes. Now, if I were you, Lily—remember, I am going to speak to you just as though we were great friends—I would try not to love Shirley. I'd try to feel—not to hate her, for that would be wrong—but I'd try to feel indifferent to her.'

'Oh, I can't!' gasped Lily.

'But you came here as Julia's friend. You ought to stick to Julia; and what's more, you must stick to her.'

'Yes; I love Julia very much, but she doesn't fascinate me as Shirley does. Oh dear! oh dear! I'd rather be scolded by Shirley than kissed by Julia. I would—I would!'

Patricia stood quite still for a minute after Lily had made her little confession. She was only a small girl—quite a child compared to any one else in the house—and yet she was important to Julia. It would be very sad, very terrible, for Julia if little Lily deserted her. Patty began to be sorry for Julia. She could not for a moment compare her to Shirley, but she did not like the idea of her losing all her friends. She stood still, therefore, for a minute thinking deeply. After a time she said in a cheerful voice:

'Take my hand, Lily, and let's have a run. I

feel that I want a lot of exercise. I want certain thoughts and certain memories to be blown away out of my brain. Here, let us run as fast as ever we can to the end of the garden yonder.'

They had wandered into the red-brick walled garden. There was a centre walk here which ran for over a quarter of a mile, and Patricia and Lily ran as fast as ever they could from one end to the other. Then they ran races. Patricia being handicapped by about a dozen yards, Lily managed to win, and was in high delight. Then, holding each other's hands, they went up the winding avenue and out on to the high-road; and by that time Lily was quite a normal little girl with normal ideas and healthy aspirations. It was at this moment that Patricia began to speak.

'Lily, I want to say something.'

'Please, Patricia, what is it?'

'How long are you going to be at The Grange?'

'Dear, kind Mrs Cairns wrote to mother to-day. She asked mother if I might remain until after Christmas. Isn't it perfectly scrumptious? I can scarcely believe that it is true.'

'Why are you so glad to be away from home?'

'Oh, I don't know. I love my home, of course, but it isn't like The Grange.'

'What makes The Grange so fascinating to you, Lily? I wish you'd tell me.'

'Well, in the first place, they're all rich here; and there is—I'm ashamed to say it, but there is good food, and there are plenty of warm fires; and, oh, it is so different from home!'

'Are you poor at home, Lily?' asked Patricia in a gentle tone.

'Yes, very poor. Father is a clergyman, you know, and there are eight of us.'

'Oh, good gracious!' cried Patty. 'Boys or girls?'

'There are six boys; and I am the second in the family. I have a little baby sister; she is only a year and a half. All the rest are boys. Of course I adore them, but they do bully me a good bit.'

'Then you feel that you are having a nice, quiet time here?'

'That's it, Patty.'

'You'd be very sorry to give up that time?'

'Why, of course; but I needn't. Mother will be ever so pleased. I can't tell you how delighted she was when I came. She thought it would be such an advantage for me. And now, you know, I have lessons—I'm not taught like that at home. I have rather a poor time with regard to learning, although I do go to school—the very best school that father can afford. But it's different from here. Yes, mother is certain to consent.'

'Well then, look here,' said Patricia. 'I judge—I may be mistaken—I judge that you are a plucky girl.'

'Why do you say that, Patty?'

'You have a straight sort of face; I don't think you'd do a mean thing.'

'Father's daughter daren't,' said Lily. Tears gathered in her eyes.

Patricia grasped her hand and squeezed it.

'But,' continued Patty, 'you're about to be subjected to a temptation. You owe allegiance to Julia. Don't throw her over. Don't be tempted. You have already given your heart to Shirley. Shirley doesn't want your heart—that is, in the real sense. If she cared to possess it, it would simply be because it is a great desire of hers to possess the love of every one she comes across. That is how things stand. You have got to face the fact that you will be subjected to temptation. If you can conquer, all right; if you can't, run away.'

'Why, that's a coward's part,' said Lily.

'In your case it would be the better part of valour. But, of course, you understand me. Now let us talk of something else.'

When the girls returned to the house the first thing they heard was that Julia was worse, and that the doctor had been summoned. He said she was suffering from a sharp feverish attack, and that she must stay in bed and be well looked after. For the present there was no cause for alarm. Mrs Cairns told the two girls that all the case required was care. The house was large, too, so that fun and music and song might go on as usual in the drawing-room in the evening. In short, no one was to be unhappy; but neither was any one to see Julia for a few days.

Presently Mrs Cairns left the hall. Lily, without glancing at Patricia, flew away to her own room, which was close to Julia's. By-and-by Heron came in and asked if she could do anything for her.

'No, thank you, Heron,' said the little girl.

'I am very sorry, miss,' continued Heron, 'but if you and Miss Shirley and Miss Patricia could manage to fasten each other's dresses this evening, and help each other to get tidy for dinner, I'd be able to devote all my time to Miss Julia.'

'Is Julia really very, very ill, Heron?' asked Lily.

'I hope not, miss; but she have got a temperature, and her bones ache like anything. She wants care. She's awful fretted; I never saw any one in such a taking. She was fit to cry most bitterly when she heard that she was not to see any one for a few days. You might send her a message—a very nice message.'

'Of course I will, Heron. Give her my love.'

'But you might send more than that, Miss Lily. You might say'—

'What shall I say, Heron?'

'Say you miss her like anything, and that you'd just be—— Oh miss! you know what to say. You and my dear young lady are such close friends. People do know what to say when they love.'

Lily coloured crimson. At that instant her love for Julia was in abeyance; even the fact of Julia's illness scarcely raised her sympathy, so absorbed was she in the thought of Shirley and her fascinations.

'I wish you'd tell me what to say. I'm not good at making up messages. You know, of course, that I am very fond of Julia. Please tell me what to say, Heron.'

'Say you miss her, and won't be happy again till you see her.'

'Oh, but perhaps that won't be quite true.'

'For goodness' sake, Miss Lily, say it. She'll fret like anything if she thinks'——

'What, Heron—what?'

'If she thinks that you are giving over loving her.'

'Oh, but I never, never could do that. I love my darling Julie. Yes, it is true; tell her I shall miss her.'

'I'll make the best of that message,' said Heron, and she left the room.

In the sickroom Julia was lying flushed and panting in her bed. The doctor had ordered medicines, and in particular a soothing draught. A fire blazed merrily in the grate. All the little comforts which the only child of rich people as a rule possesses surrounded her. She looked with her feverish, sunken eyes full at Heron when the maid reappeared.

'Heron, come here and talk to me.'

'You oughtn't to talk, Miss Julie.'

'But I must; I'm ever so miserable. Do you know, I have all sorts of queer fancies as I lie here. I think this illness most unlucky. She'll have it all her own way now.'

'My dear young lady, what do you mean?'

'You know quite well what I mean, Heron. Shirley—that hateful girl'——

'Oh, Miss Julie! now you are ill you oughtn't to nourish bad feelings.'

'For the last hour I've been dozing,' continued

Julia, who did not think it worth while to explain matters, 'and I've had a dream—a horrid dream. I thought Lily had got tired of me.'

'Oh, Miss Julia, and she has just sent such a sweet message!'

'Has she?' said Julia rather eagerly. 'I'm very fond of Lily. But I thought she was out. You know, I made such a mistake! She came to ask me, poor little dear! if she might take a walk with Shirley. My head was aching so badly that I really didn't take time to consider the matter; I said yes. All I wanted was that she should go. But now I'm frightened. There's no saying what may happen. Shirley isn't to be trusted.'

'Here's your medicine, Miss Julia. You must shut your eyes and go to sleep now.'

'You are sure—quite sure—that Lily loves me still, Heron?'

'Why, of course she do, miss,' said Heron. 'And she didn't go for a walk with Miss Shirley.'

'Didn't she? Oh, I am glad!'

'No, she didn't, miss. She was out for a short time with Miss Patricia. They both came in together.'

'And hasn't Shirley returned?'

'No, miss. I don't know when she'll be in. Really, Miss Julia, I won't talk to you any more.'

Julia owed to a sense of soothing. The medicine she had taken began to have its effect, and she fell into an unbroken slumber. Heron, well satisfied, seated herself by her side.

CHAPTER XII

A TRAITOR TO JULIA.



FEW days afterwards Shirley, who had taken possession more or less of the South Parlour, was seated there, with her pets surrounding her, and a quantity of needlework in her hand. She was putting clever stitches into a many-coloured piece of embroidery. She was fonder of work than of reading. Now and then she stopped to play with a cat or kitten, to amuse herself with Mordecai, or to pat Mops on the head. She was singing a Mexican song under her breath. Never had she looked more careless and more beautiful.

Patty and she had been talking for some time, but Patty had now gone away to attend to some other duties.

By-and-by the door was opened very slowly and Lily poked in her small face. She gave a timid glance in Shirley's direction, and then, crossing the room almost on tiptoe, apologised for fetching her story-book.

'Don't go, child,' said Shirley carelessly. 'You can read as long as you like if you don't disturb me.'

'Oh! thank you, Shirley,' said the little girl.

'I'm reading the *Daisy Chain*. Don't you like it very much?'

'I've never read it,' said Shirley, with a yawn. — 'Come, Mops, what are you doing? Tearing my dress?'

Lily gave a strained laugh, and looked with longing eyes at Shirley. Shirley shrugged her shoulders, and sat facing the fire a little more obviously than she had been before. Lily took up her book and tried to read, but dancing between the page and her own eyes was the dazzling face of Shirley.

Oh, if she might speak—if she might say what was in her heart! It was terrible to love a person and yet not be allowed to love her. For the first time in her young life love seemed to her to be sinful. She could not understand her own emotions.

By-and-by Shirley raised her head.

'Well, Lily,' she said, 'how is the dear lover upstairs—the loverette, I call her? Is she better?'

'Julie is rather better,' said Lily in a guarded tone. 'I think she is to get up to-day; I'm not quite sure.'

'You'll be glad when you see her again.'

Lily was silent.

'It will be a great treat for you. I can imagine how you must have suffered, poor little bit of a Lily!'

'If I—if I really suffered, would you be sorry, Shirley?'

'Oh yes—I think so,' said Shirley. 'I don't like the idea of people suffering. But I prefer

people to suffer rather than animals. If my Mops was in grief, then indeed my heart would ache.'

'You oughtn't to feel like that; it's wrong,' said Lily.

Shirley gave her a keen glance; then she shrugged her shoulders.

'What a quaint little thing you are!' she said. 'But you'll see your own Julia soon and be happy.'

'Shirley, Shirley!' said Lily.

She sprang to her feet. The book fell to the ground. Her eyes grew brimful of tears; her whole face was flushed with emotion.

'I must—I must say it,' she said. 'I won't be glad to see her again.'

'What do you mean by that, you most naughty child?'

'It isn't her I love; it's you—it's you I love,' said little Lily, and she flung herself on her knees, and bending forward, laid her curly head on the nearest chair. 'Oh! I know I'm wicked,' she continued, 'but it's true.'

Shirley did not again call her a quaint little thing. She was quite silent for a minute. Whether she felt joy or sorrow was never known. After a time she walked across the room and touched Lily on the shoulder.

'Get up,' she said.

Lily rose to her feet. She made a sorry little figure with her tearful eyes and the piteous expression of her small face.

'Look at me,' said Shirley.

Lily raised her eyes.

'Look full into my face.'

Lily did as she was told.

‘Captive,’ said Shirley then, ‘kiss me; you may.’

‘Oh! oh!’ said Lily.

‘You may,’ said Shirley.

Lily flung her arms round Shirley’s neck, and again and again and again she kissed her lips and cheek and brow.

‘Oh, you darling, you darling!’ she said.

Shirley remained passive. Presently she said:

‘Look out, Lily!’

Lily raised her eyes. Julia was being brought by Mrs Cairns into the room—Julia, weak and pale, but decidedly better.

Mrs Cairns had noticed nothing. She was absorbed in the condition of the fire, in the aspect of the room.

‘You’ll do nicely here, my darling,’ she said.—‘Girls, aren’t you glad to see her again? But you mustn’t tire her, for she is very weak.—Shirley, do you mind her having your chair?—Lily’——

But Lily had fled. She had given one quick glance into Julia’s face, had read the look in Julia’s eyes, and had left the South Parlour. Trembling, panting, almost beside herself, the frightened child flew down the corridor, up the wide stairs, and into her own room. There she frantically opened the wardrobe and took out her cap and cloak. She wrapped herself up, quite forgetting her thin house-shoes. A minute or two afterwards she was out. There was a tempest of wind blowing, and sleet was falling at intervals from the leaden sky. Lily walked on and on.

'Traitor to Julia! Traitor to Julia!' she kept repeating to herself.

Meanwhile Shirley, having quite recovered from her momentary surprise, went up to Julia and did what she could for her comfort. Julia lay back in her chair.

'You are not looking at all well, Julia; but you will soon be better,' said Shirley.

There was no response on Julia's part.

'I'm so sorry you are unwell,' continued Shirley.

'Mother,' said Julia then, raising her eyes and fixing them on her mother's face, 'the South Parlour used to be my room, did it not?'

'And so it is now, my sweet.'

'Then just for this first day, when I am ill, may I have it quite to myself?—Do you greatly mind, Shirley? You can go—oh, anywhere else.'

'You shall go into my special boudoir, Shirley,' said Mrs Cairns in her cordial voice. 'You and the other girls can go there this afternoon. It is going to be a horrible day, I'm sure. Dear Julia is weak.—But you'd like little Lily to stay with you, wouldn't you, Julia?'

'I think not, mother. I would rather be quite alone.'

Julia gave an imperceptible shudder.

'She certainly is weaker than I thought,' was Mrs Cairns's reflection.

She eagerly bustled about, doing what she could for her, and then she left the room. Julia lay with closed eyes. Shirley gathered up her pets. When she got to the door she turned.

‘Is there anything I can do for you?’ she said in her sweetest, most seductive voice.

Julia opened her eyes with a start.

‘No, thank you,’ was her answer.

Shirley opened the door and closed it softly behind her. Going down the corridor, she met Patty. Patty had just returned from a visit to Aunt Hannah, and was bringing a basket of fresh fruit and some tempting vegetables for Julia’s delectation.

‘Julia is in the South Parlour,’ was Shirley’s remark.

‘Is she? Then she must be better.’

‘She looks very bad. Patty, I have something to say.’

‘What is it, Shirley? You are troubled.’

‘I should think so. The most terrible *dénouement* has just occurred. In fact, in vulgar parlance, the fat is in the fire.’

‘What is it? What is it? Tell me.’

‘Come into Mrs Cairns’s boudoir; she has given us leave to occupy it.’

‘What! may we not see Julia?’

‘Julia herself has turned us out.’

‘Her manners haven’t improved with her illness,’ was Patty’s remark.

‘Poor Julia!’ responded Shirley. ‘You’d pity her if you knew. What do you think? I was working by the fire, my pets surrounding me—everything as cosy as you can imagine—when in came little Lily. She looked as woebegone as girl could look, and she gave me a most pathetic glance. She stepped across the room as though she were treading on hot coals, and took up a

book, the *Daisy Chain*. She was going out of the room, when I told her she might stay if she wanted to read it. She was as thankful as though I had given her untold gold. After a time I heard her sigh, and presently I spoke. I said something about Julia, and how glad Lily would be to see her again, and the poor mite lost all self-control, and told me to my face that I was the one she loved. Poor little thing! She burst into tears then, flung herself on the ground, and buried her face in the cushions of one of the chairs. I just couldn't stand it. She looked so pretty and so small and frail, and I felt so big and strong. So I went up to her and asked her to look at me; and she did look. And then I said—you know my grandiloquent style, don't you, Patty?—I said, "Captive, you may kiss me." It was just as though I'd offered a cup of cold water to a thirsty soul. The poor thing was so excited that she didn't know what to do, and then she sprang at me and hugged and hugged me. Oh, she was a hungry little mite! Her love was real love at any rate.'

'Well,' said Patty, 'it's all very wrong, of course, but you know you are a witch. You seem to have that sort of effect on every one. But what *dénouement* do you mean? This was so very evident, you had only to say the word to get the embrace.'

'Yes; but, you see, neither Lily nor I knew what was coming. We could not guess that at that crucial moment Mrs Cairns, with Julia leaning on her arm, would enter the South Parlour.'

'Oh, my goodness!' exclaimed Patricia.

The exclamation was wrung from her before she was aware.

'You may well use extraordinary words. Wasn't it awful? Lily turned so white that I thought she would faint. She banged out of the room somehow; but of course I kept my wits.'

'Do you think Julia saw?' said Patty.

'Mrs Cairns didn't see, but Julia did—oh, fast enough! And her whole poor little face froze; and if there's a miserable girl in the world, it's that wretched Julia. Now, what's to be done?'

'Lily must feel rather bad. I spoke to Lily a few days ago. It was not right of her; really it wasn't.'

'You couldn't expect the poor mite to keep in her emotions for ever,' said Shirley. 'Really this grows interesting.'

'Shirley, I believe you are a monster,' said her friend. 'You have no right to go on in such a way. You needn't get people to love you; it's your own fault.'

'I never yet heard that a person was to be blamed for getting people to love her,' was Shirley's answer. 'Really and truly, Patty, you are past bearing.'

'Am I?' said Patty.

The luncheon-bell rang, and the two girls strolled into the dining-room. There they found Mr and Mrs Cairns and Miss Munro; but there was no sign of Lily. No notice was taken of her absence at first; but as the meal proceeded Mrs Cairns first, and then Mr Cairns, asked for the child.

‘Perhaps she is with Julia,’ said Mrs Cairns. ‘She is Julia’s own special little friend. Perhaps they are having lunch together.’

‘I don’t think they are,’ said Shirley.

A messenger was sent to the little girl’s room, but Lily was not there. The messenger explored the nursery and the other rooms of the house, but no sign of Lily. Where was the little girl?

‘She must have gone out,’ said Shirley. ‘Yes, I’m sure she has gone out.’

‘On such a day as this? Why, she’ll catch her death of cold,’ said Mr Cairns.

‘Shall I go and look for her?’ said Patty suddenly.

‘I’ll go with you,’ said Mr Cairns. ‘We must search for the child at once. Where in the world can she be?’

CHAPTER XIII.

A DISREPUTABLE RELATION.



SHIRLEY also decided to go and look for Lily, and while the two girls and Mr Cairns were busy outside endeavouring in every possible manner to get news of the lost child, events of some moment were taking place in the South Parlour.

When Shirley left her Julia sat for some time perfectly still. Her illness had weakened her, but she was not as weak as her friends thought—at least, it was very evident that the tension of her feelings for the time kept her up. She rose from her chair as one too restless to remain quiet. She paced up and down the room. In this highly disturbed condition Heron found her.

‘My dear Miss Julie, what is the matter? Are you not well? Are you getting another turn? Oh, this will never do! You ought not to walk about the first day you are out of bed.’

‘I can’t sit still,’ said Julia.

‘You are getting quite feverish again, my love.’

‘No, I’m not really, Heron; I’m much better. I don’t intend to stay ill any longer. This is my home, isn’t it, Heron?’

‘My darling, your poor brain is wandering. Your home? Of course it is.’

'I have a greater right to the rooms and to the love of those here than any one else in the house.'

'Ah, Miss Julie! if it's love, we who knew you since you were an infant love you well enough.'

'Heron,' said Julia—she took the maid's hands in both her own—'tell me from the bottom of your heart that you love me.'

'Indeed, indeed I do, missy.'

Heron's kind eyes filled with tears.

'And mother does?'

'Oh, my darling, need you ask?'

'And father?'

'He's that set on you, miss, as never was.'

'But, Heron, you all love my enemy.'

'If you mean Miss Kendal—Miss Shirley Kendal—yes.'

'Heron, Heron, tell me—tell me the very, very truth: you don't love her?'

Heron removed her hands with some force from Julia's clinging clasp.

'That wouldn't be true, missy,' she said. 'I do love her. She has that about her which makes people love her. Even your aunt Hannah, who don't easily give her heart away, is that took up with her! It can't be helped, missy. You can't take away from her the great gift given her by Almighty God.'

'And father and mother love her too,' said Julia in a constrained voice.

'Oh, don't they just! Of course—of course.'

Julia flung herself into a chair by the fire.

'You can go away, Heron,' she said after a moment's pause.

Heron softly withdrew. By-and-by she returned with a plump grouse done to a turn, some choice vegetables, and a glass of strong Burgundy.

‘You’ve got to eat your dinner, missy. The sort of thoughts you’ve just been indulging in are mostly caused by weakness. It don’t harm you, darling, for others to be loved; and if you would turn round and see how much there is to commend itself in dear Miss Shirley, why, you’d—you’d know for yourself that you couldn’t turn away the God-given gift from her.’

‘I’ll eat my dinner, if you please, Heron. And if you please, also, we won’t talk any more about Miss Kendal.’

Heron proceeded to cut up the grouse, and to pop tempting morsels on her young lady’s plate. As she did so she said slowly:

‘Then, too, there’s little Miss Lily. She loves—— Oh, whatever is the matter, miss?’

‘Heron,’ said Julia, with flashing eyes, ‘what do you think? I did suppose that Lily—Lily Bell, my own special pet—would keep to me. But a few days’ absence produces the usual result. I found her in Shirley’s arms—yes, in Shirley’s arms—kissing her, Heron—hugging her—loving her with all her might and main.’

‘Ah!’ said Heron.

She felt annoyed and displeased. Lily at least might have been faithful to her poor young lady.

‘After all,’ she added after a moment’s reflection, ‘I suppose it is to be expected, and it don’t make her love you the less.’

‘Little traitor!’ said Julia.

Heron tried to utter a few words of comfort, but Julia would not be comforted. She ate her dinner, however, in a defiant sort of fashion, being determined, as she expressed it, to get well as fast as possible in order to be able to move about the house, and to take her share in the games and the fun, and in the lessons also—in short, to be at hand to circumvent Shirley whenever possible.

But when dinner was quite over and Mrs Cairns had visited her for a few minutes, telling her that she was obliged to go out on important business, Julia found herself quite alone. Now, it was dull to be alone. She did not want Heron; she did not want any of the girls; but, all the same, she wanted company. Her eyes were weak, and she could not read for long at a time. The thought of lessons was repugnant to her; the whole aspect of her present life was gray as gray could be.

By-and-by Henry the footman came in and told her that Miss Ffrench had called and would like to see her.

Julia's first wish was not to have Honora admitted, but then she thought it might be interesting to see her. Accordingly the young lady, looking radiant and remarkably pretty in her winter furs, came into the room. She uttered an exclamation of surprise when she saw Julia.

'Oh, you poor little washed-out dear!' she said. 'Whatever has been the matter with you?'

'Only a bad, feverish cold, Honora; and I am so sick of people talking about it and pitying me. I'll be all right again in no time.'

'I hope you will. I won't say anything more about your appearance. Of course, I heard that you were ill from Shirley.'

'You see a great deal of Shirley, don't you?' said Julia.

Julia had not hitherto given herself away to this special friend, and Honora little guessed how devoured with jealousy the poor girl was.

'See her! I should just think so!' she exclaimed brightly. 'She's just the dearest, most bewitching creature. Julia, I do envy you.'

'Why don't you ask her on a visit?' said Julia in a low voice.

As she spoke she turned her face partly away. Honora paused for a moment, surprised at the tone; then she said:

'I'd like to, but I don't think it is fair to take her away when you have company; do you?'

'Yes, it would be perfectly fair,' said Julia.

'Then you'd let me? You wouldn't mind?'

'I'd let you,' said Julia, with a peculiar smile.

Honora looked at her.

'I can't help saying it,' she remarked after a pause; 'you are not at all well.'

'I'll be all right very soon. If you had been confined to bed for over a week, with horrid feverishness and no end of detestable medicines, and only gruel and things of that sort to eat, you'd be weak too.'

'Of course. Was it as bad as all that, dear?'

'Yes, quite as bad as that.'

'Then no wonder you are weak. I oughtn't to stay, ought I?'

‘I’m quite glad to have you, Honora; I’m rather lonely here.’

‘I wonder the girls aren’t with you. They’re all so devoted to you, too.’

‘Oh, are they?’ said Julia.

‘Yes. I do say it’s queer that they should leave you alone.’

‘It isn’t their fault,’ said Julia, who could be honest enough after a fashion. ‘I told them to go. I didn’t think I could stand the stir.’

‘And yet you can stand me.’

‘Oh, but you are so nice and quiet.’

‘I wonder if I ought to take that as a compliment or as the reverse.’

‘As a compliment, Nora; quite as a compliment.’

‘Thank you, Julia. Well, I’ll be off in a minute. I really can’t stay. Our bazaar is to be on the tenth of next month, and we are ever so busy. The saleswomen are all to be dressed as Swiss peasants. It isn’t specially original, but it’s about the only thing we could think of. We all hoped that you would be one.’

‘Well, I can’t now, really. It will be getting on to Christmas, and I shall be awfully busy.’

‘Would you really not mind if Shirley came to stay with us, just to help to get our stall ready?’

‘You are welcome to her as far as I am concerned.’

‘Well then, you just are a dear. I’ll write her a line and ask her to come over to-morrow. You can have her back when you really want her. Why, Julia, you look quite pleased.’

‘Of course; I love to give pleasure,’ said Julia, still in that peculiar voice.

Honora stood up, added a few more words, and then took her leave.

‘How queer Julia is!’ she said to herself. ‘But, of course, it is her illness. Well, I’ll write a line to Shirley.’

She asked Henry to take her somewhere where she could get note-paper and envelopes, and he conducted her to Mrs Cairns’s boudoir. She wrote a brief note to Shirley stating what she wanted, and begging of her to come the next day. This she left on the table, asking Henry to deliver it to the young lady when she came in.

A few minutes afterwards Honora was speeding as fast as her feet could carry her in the direction of her home. She was highly delighted at the thought of having Shirley as a guest for a short time, and did not give Julia and her somewhat strange manners any further thought.

Just as she reached the gate she saw a shabby-looking fly, evidently from the railway station, enter the avenue. She was somewhat surprised, and curiosity made her look within. There was a very thin-faced woman inside, with a nose too long for her face, and a peaky sort of chin. She seemed very anxious, and was also very pale.

‘I wonder who that can be,’ thought the girl; and then she very naturally forgot all about her.

There was still no sign whatever of Lily Bell; or at least, if there was, the party who went out to seek for her had not brought her home. Julia

sat and yawned in the South Parlour. By-and-by Henry opened the door softly.

‘Miss Julia,’ he said.

‘Yes, Henry. What is it?’

‘There’s a person—a stranger she is—has called. She wants to see Miss Shirley. Do you know where she may be, miss?’

‘I believe she is out, Henry. Please shut the door; I can’t bear a draught.’

Henry went away. Presently he came back again.

‘The person says, miss, that her name is Kendal—that she is a relation of Miss Shirley’s. She is in great trouble, and must catch the next train. She wonders, miss, if you—or perhaps Heron—would see her. You are the only one of the family in, miss. I said you weren’t at all well, but she begged like anything that I’d give you a message.’

‘A person of the name of Kendal—a relative of Shirley’s!’ thought Julia to herself. ‘Who can this be?’ Her curiosity was roused.

‘You can show her in if you like,’ she said. ‘Tell her that I’m not well, and that she mustn’t stay long.’

Julia roused herself, poked the fire, and sat up with a pleased expression on her little white face. The door was quietly opened and Henry announced the stranger. The tall, thin-faced woman whom Honora had seen in the dusty station fly came in and stood a few paces away from the door.

‘Well,’ said Julia, ‘can I do anything for you?’

‘You are Miss Kendal’s cousin, miss?’

‘Yes; my name is Cairns. Will you take a chair, please?’

The woman seated herself on the edge of the nearest chair.

‘I am a cousin of Miss Kendal’s,’ she said. ‘She was always very good to me. She used to give me a pound a week. Her father did it first, and she did afterwards. I am in very great trouble now. I wrote to Miss Kendal a few days ago, and did not get an answer. I wondered why she did not write, and I sold some of my things and came here on purpose to find out. I thought that I might perhaps see her; and yet I must go back by the next train, for I have got a sick child at home. I am Miss Kendal’s cousin by marriage, and my child is very ill. She always did allow me a pound a week. I don’t know why she stopped it; and then when I wrote she didn’t reply. I am in very great distress.’

‘Indeed!’ said Julia eagerly. ‘And you are her cousin—her real, own, proper cousin?’

‘My husband was cousin to her father, miss. He has been dead for some years. While he lived we were very well-to-do, but after his death a lot of money was lost, and I have nothing to support my child with. And she gave me a pound a week. It was arranged by her father that it was to be so. She owes me a good lot of money now, miss. I don’t understand. I’m in great, great trouble, miss, and I don’t understand it at all.’

‘It is strange of her not to give you the money,’ said Julia.

Her first impulse was not to believe the woman, but when she looked at her again it seemed to Julia that it would be quite impossible to make up that sort of story. Besides, her real wish at the present moment was to think badly of Shirley. What a dreadful thing it would be if Shirley, who was so rich and had such a lot of money of her own, neglected her starving relatives—made them promises which she did not fulfil, and left their letters unanswered!

‘How did you know my cousin’s address?’ she asked presently.

‘Why, of course, she gave it to me. She was bound to do so, so to speak. I can’t think what I have done to offend her. The money was promised as faithful as could be. Is she likely to be in soon, miss?’

‘I don’t know. She may return any minute.’

The woman stood up; her face was full of anxiety.

‘I can’t stay,’ she said.

‘Why not? Won’t you wait for her? You can wait in’—— ‘In the servants’ hall,’ she was about to say, but she checked herself.

‘I must catch the next train, really,’ said the woman. ‘It’s on account of my child. I’ll write to her again.’

‘Shall I tell her about you?’ asked Julia.

‘If you would, miss. Indeed, my story is as true as possible. I know what has happened. She is ashamed of me; she is a very proud young lady.’

‘Have you known her long?’ said Julia.

'Ever since she was a child. I met her first in South America; and then we came across each other in Paris. I hope she has improved, miss; there was need of it.'

'Do you mean,' said Julia eagerly, 'that in the past she was not quite the very nicest sort of girl?'

The woman smiled. Notwithstanding every effort, her face was grim. Her eager eyes fixed themselves on Julia's face. She was reading her through.

'I could tell things about her,' she said, 'but I just won't. Nothing will tempt me, miss, so there!'

'Give me your address,' said the girl eagerly.

She drew forward a blotter, dipped her pen in the ink, and waited for the woman to reply.

'This is it, miss,' said Mrs Kendal after a pause: '12 Cumnor Street, Hillingborough. The town where I live is thirty miles away—no more.'

'And you live there, and your little boy?'

'Yes, miss.'

'Does Shirley know him?'

'Of course, miss. I'm sorry to have to say it, but the child can't bear her. He can't really, miss.'

'Listen,' said Julia. 'I'm sorry for you. One has only to look at you to see that you are starved. Shirley, my cousin, owes you money; she has not paid you. It is shameful. I will give you two pounds. I wish it might be more, but two pounds are better than nothing.'

'Indeed, indeed they are, miss.'

Julia put her hand into her pocket. She took

out her purse. From the centre little enclosure she removed two sovereigns. These she dropped into the woman's palm.

'Oh, thank you, thank you, miss! If only Shirley had a heart like yours, Miss Cairns! I'm sure, miss, if there's anything I can do for you I'll be only too delighted.'

'Thank you,' replied Julia, 'there is nothing.'

'You're very fond of Shirley, ain't you, miss?'

'She's my cousin,' replied Julia. 'I will tell her about you when she comes in, and I will ask her to continue the money she promised to give you. Perhaps you had better go now.'

'I must go, miss, or I'll miss the train. I came here in a fly rather than run the risk of losing my train. But before I go I have one thing to say. I know well that you are far too clever to be took in by a girl like my cousin Shirley. You have found her out. It's few at the first start who'd find out a girl of Shirley's type, for she's wonderfully cunning. Perhaps it would be best for her not to be told that I have called. You might think it best, all things considered, miss; and if you would like at any time to see me again, I could tell you—— Oh, there was a theft—a theft—when Shirley was a child, and there were things she wouldn't like known. She'd find the place rather hot for her if all was known. I could tell you; I could come to you any day by appointment.'

'Will you go now?' said Julia. 'I will think about it and let you know.'

She rang the bell, and Henry appeared.

‘Show this person out,’ said the girl.

Mrs Kendal walked as far as the door; then she dropped a curtsy and said again, ‘Any day, miss, at your convenience,’ and left the room.

Julia sat still, her heart beating hard. The sudden temptation presented to her nearly took her breath away. Here indeed was a loophole out of all her difficulties. A disreputable relation of Shirley’s had called, but she knew something against the immaculate, the dazzling girl. What did it mean? Would Julia touch this pitch and so defile herself? She did not know.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RUNAWAY FOUND.



MR CAIRNS and his two energetic companions found Lily at last. She had wandered out on to the high-road, and had then sought refuge in an old gravel quarry. It was Shirley who traced her there. She had keen eyes for any trail, and had noticed that some brambles were broken, and also that there was a fragment of a brown dress on one of them. She turned aside to examine further, with the result that by-and-by she led her companions to Lily's hiding-place.

Poor Lily herself was distracted with grief and misery. She scarcely knew what she was doing. When Mr Cairns and the two girls came up to her she had reached that stage of grief when she was more sorry for herself than anything else. Her first violent passion had subsided. She was lonely, hungry, and frightened. When she started to run away from The Grange, misery, hot anger, and remorse bore her company. But now the heat and passion of her despair had cooled down, and she was a very wretched little girl, afraid to go back to Shirley and to Julia's home, afraid to go home herself. Her first thought had been to reach the railway station

and take a third-class ticket to her parents' home in a distant county; but Lily discovered that she had not money enough even for a third-class ticket home, and this thought quite paralysed her.

She was, therefore, more relieved than anything else when Shirley's bright face peeped round the corner, when Shirley uttered something like a whoop and a cry, and springing on the lonely little girl, lifted her into her arms.

'What a naughty, naughty!' she said. 'Oh Lily, you little goose! What is the matter? Such a tearful face, and such a cold, cold little person! You will catch your death, you silly Lily.—Uncle Stephen, here she is, the bad little truant! We won't scold her, will we?—Oh Lily, my dear, look up!'

A faint feeling had stolen over the child, and just for an instant she laid her head against Shirley's shoulder.

'There, Lily, that's all right. Now look up. Forget that you have been a naughty little runaway. We have come to take you home and to pet you like anything.'

'Yes, of course we have, Lily,' said Patty's strong voice. 'Come, put your hand inside my arm and inside Shirley's arm. Isn't Mr Cairns kind to have helped to find you?'

'I'm ever so—ever so—ever so'—— began Lily in a hysterical voice.

'We don't care what you are "ever so" at the present moment,' said Shirley. 'You have just got to come home, and be cheerful, and forget whatever naughty little thought was in your head.'



G. C. Shirley uttered something like a whoop and a cry.

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Lily felt wonderfully soothed and comforted. It was delightful, after all, to be found out—to be found out and not scolded—to have Shirley and Patty petting her, squeezing her hand, and looking at her with loving eyes; and to see Mr Cairns's contented back as he strode on in front of the girls.

'I will go on,' he said, 'and announce the arrival. Your aunt has gone to pay some calls, my dear Shirley, but Julia will be anxious.'

Lily was so relieved that she did not even mind this allusion to Julia, and by-and-by they all entered the house.

Meanwhile Julia had made up her mind. For the present Shirley was not to be told about the stranger who had called to see her. Henry had his directions.

'Henry,' said the young lady, 'say nothing to Miss Shirley about the woman whom I saw in her behalf. Don't say that she called. I have done what was necessary. I don't wish my cousin to be pained.'

Henry looked mysterious and important. Of course, Miss Julia knew what was right to be done, and he made up his mind to keep the secret of the shabby woman and the shabby cab locked in his own breast.

As soon as ever the girls entered the house Shirley took Lily's hand.

'Now look here, Lily,' she said; 'unless you want to be the most miserable little girl in the world, you have got to go straight to Julia this very minute, and kiss her and fuss over her, and

tell her that you love her much better than you love me.'

'But I don't, Shirley; I really don't,' said poor Lily.

'Well, tell her that you love her. I can't possibly have you soil your conscience with a lie, but at least do your best. And don't be a coward, Lily; if you are I shall despise you.'

The thought of this, and the flash in Shirley's fine brown eyes, had a greater effect upon Lily than anything else. Her feet trembled under her as she went to the South Parlour. She opened the door softly. Her ways were always soft and somewhat deprecating. It would be difficult to be angry with a little girl like this, and now that Julia had had time to realise the fact that Lily was missing, she began to be a trifle uncomfortable about her. Accordingly, when Lily poked in her face, it was in an almost cheerful tone that Julia said:

'Well, Lily, you truant, and so you have come back.'

'Oh Julia,' cried Lily, 'are you going to be sweet? Are you going to be loving?'

'I think I have always been loving to you, Lily. What is the matter?'

'I want to hug you like anything,' said Lily.

'Because you love me?'

'Of course—of course!'

Lily gave a sob, then she came farther into the room, and then she flung herself on the warm hearth-rug and kissed Julia's feet.

Now, Julia was not above being adored in any

sort of fashion. She thought it rather nice to have her pretty feet kissed, and presently she bent down and touched Lily's tangled mass of dark hair.

'Get up, child,' she said.

'You have forgiven me for what you saw?'

'Yes; it will be all right presently,' said Julia.

Just as she uttered the words Shirley burst into the room. There were no softly turned handles in Shirley's case; she always sprang upon people, bright like an electric flash. She was always in extremes, either in the depths of misery or in the heights of bliss.

'Oh Julia,' she exclaimed—'oh Lily—what do you think? Honora has asked me to go and stay with her for a few days. I think it would be a splendid way out of everything. Do you mind if I go?'

'Please yourself,' said Julia coldly.

She looked up at Shirley, endeavouring to see on that frank face some signs of the meanness and guilt which the strange woman had hinted at. 'I have heard,' whispered Julia to her own heart, 'that people with red hair are not to be trusted.' She found Shirley quite bearable now that she had her more or less in her power.

'Go if you like,' she said. 'It may be best for you to be out of the house until I am quite well and strong again.'

'And I will look after all the darling animals,' said Lily softly.

'Will you? Then that will be heavenly. Honora wants me to go to-day. I'll just rush upstairs

and get Heron to pack my things. I have seen Aunt Charity, and she gives me leave. I shall be absent until Monday.'

'Good!' whispered Julia to herself. 'Now I shall be first once more. I shall get well quickly. Oh, if only they'd adopt her! If only some one would adopt her! Perhaps if father and mother knew they would think it best to send her to school. They love her now, but if they knew they wouldn't keep a girl near me who had done anything disgraceful. Oh, of course, I don't want to find out; I don't want to injure her; but it is nice to know that I could if I would.'

CHAPTER XV.

AUNT HANNAH AS COMFORTER.



SHIRLEY was no longer at The Grange.

Mr and Mrs Cairns missed her; so did Patty, and so did Lily. But Julia was happy. She got well very quickly; she did not allow the grass to grow under her feet in her convalescence. She ate heartily, insisted on going from room to room, and finally delighted her parents by coming into the drawing-room for a short time the first evening of Shirley's absence.

'No, I'm not tired,' she said, as they all made remarks of astonishment and solicitude. 'I'm not a bit tired, and I'm going to sit close to mother, and to hold father's hand.'

Mr and Mrs Cairns looked at her lovingly, and when Julia raised her father's hand to her lips, he put his arm round her and strained her to his heart, and whispered in a tone which might have satisfied the most exacting little girl:

'My Julie, it is good to have you back again.'

But Julia could not leave well alone.

'Then you don't miss Shirley?' she said. 'You do love me better than Shirley?'

She said the words aloud, and Mr Cairns answered after a moment of absolute silence:

‘I have always loved you best, Julia; but we miss your cousin. Her brightness, her vivacity, her taking ways, her talent for music, would make her missed in any house fortunate enough to have her as an inmate.’

These words were like gall and wormwood to Julia, but she had to smother her feelings, and stared very straight before her. There was a bright fire in the grate, and she kept looking at it and seeing pictures.

The other girls were busily engaged over a game which Patty was teaching Lily. Julia found herself more or less alone.

‘I expect I’m one meant for a life of solitude,’ she said to herself; and then she looked again into the flames, and it seemed to her that she saw pictures that were by no means pretty pictures. They were not the pictures that ought to visit the mind of a good and amiable girl.

At that moment, sad as it is to relate, Julia Cairns was neither good nor amiable. She was planning something which would relieve her—at least, she hoped it would relieve her—of the presence of the girl whom she was beginning to hate. She had no room for anything but the grievance of her own envious and naughty feelings, and the picture was Shirley as she would look when all was known, when the woman who had visited Julia that day had revealed her secret and told that bad, bad, dreadful thing in Shirley’s past.

Yes, no matter what it was, Julia felt that she must know it—she must.

She went to bed early, and the next day

passed very much as the days used to pass before any fascinating Shirley had arrived at The Grange.

But Shirley herself came over in the course of the morning, and she brought Honora with her. They entered the house like a most friendly, agreeable, health-giving breeze. Honora had caught the infection of Shirley's bright ways. They wanted Patty and Lily to come with them to Honora's home, The Hilltop, as, many hands making light work, they wished to get through their labours the more quickly by having the aid of the two girls.

Patty immediately said she would go. So too did Miss Munro. But Lily, after a moment's violent struggle with herself, ran up to Julia, and putting her arms round her neck, said:

'I'll go if Julie goes.'

'Oh, I couldn't possibly dream of going to-day,' said Julia in a voice which, with all her efforts, she could scarcely make agreeable; 'I'm not nearly strong enough.'

'But indeed, Julia, I think you are,' said Miss Munro. 'You seemed so wonderfully well last night; and if we drove up in the brougham'——

'Yes, yes, Julia, the brougham,' laughed Shirley—'the brougham with both windows shut. You remember, don't you? You remember when I came? If you used that brougham you couldn't come to grief.'

Julia's eyes flashed fire.

'That's true,' she said; 'I couldn't come to grief, but I prefer not going, all the same.'

‘Oh, we’ll do without her quite well,’ said Honora, giving a glance of adoration at Shirley.

‘Then I’ll stay with Julia,’ said Lily.

Julia was immensely pleased, and gave little Lily a hug.

A few minutes later the rest of the party hurried off to The Hilltop.

Julia and Lily spent a calm and somewhat dull day together. Lily, although she had sacrificed herself to Julia, felt intensely sad. She longed beyond words to be at The Hilltop. Her face reflected her feelings, and at tea-time Julia said to her:

‘What’s the matter, Lily?’

‘Nothing,’ replied Lily.

‘Don’t you really like being all alone with me—with me, your very dearest friend?’

‘Of course I do,’ said Lily.

‘Now, suppose you had a chance—just a chance—of going to The Hilltop—suppose they sent for you in a great hurry, and you had to go off—would it break your heart?’

‘Why do you ask, Julia? I wish you wouldn’t. You know I’m not going to The Hilltop. I could have gone if I liked, but I said I’d stay with you.’

‘You did,’ said Julia, now in a very bad temper; ‘but I’d much rather not have you if you don’t really prefer to stay with me.’

‘Well, I’m here anyhow,’ said Lily, restlessly drawing a plate of bread-and-butter towards her as she spoke.

‘So you are; but answer my question. Would you rather be with me or with Shirley?’

‘Don’t, Julia—don’t be silly,’ said Lily.

‘But you shall speak—you shall! I don’t want you if you would rather be with Shirley.’

‘But I’m with you,’ answered Lily. She had never told a lie in her life, and would not now whatever happened. ‘I am with you, and you are going to teach me double bezique after tea, aren’t you?’

‘Bother double bezique!’ replied Julia rudely. ‘Would you prefer to be with Shirley or with me?’

Lily was silent.

‘Well, I am waiting to hear the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.’

But Lily did not speak. She shut up her firm little mouth, locking her hands tightly together. She was trembling, and tears were near her eyes. Julia kept looking at her. At last she said the single word—

‘Well?’

‘If you really must know, of course, there would be more fun with Shirley.’

‘You have spoken. I don’t want you any longer. Please yourself; do what you like; go where you like. I’m going to the South Parlour. I claim the privilege of retaining that room for my own private use. Now then, go; I don’t want you.’

Julia left the room. Lily sat for a minute or two, and then she burst into tears.

She was sobbing very quietly to herself, wondering what was to happen, wondering if she ought to write to her mother and ask her to take her

back, if she ought to forgo all the delightful advantages of education from Miss Munro and the different professors, if she would have to give up Julia, whom she loved, and Shirley, whom she adored, when brisk steps were heard coming along the passage, the door was burst open, and a breezy voice said:

‘Why, little Melancholy, and what are you doing here?’

Lily raised her eyes to meet the frank, keen gaze of Aunt Hannah.

‘What is it, you little morsel? What are you crying about? Where are all the others—my god-daughter Julia, the gay Shirley, the sensible Patty—and what are you doing your pretty little self?’

‘Oh, they are—they are in all sorts of places,’ said Lily.

‘Hark to the child!’ cried Aunt Hannah. ‘Now, I tell you what. I’ve got to rest a bit, and it strikes me that I’d do it a deal more comfortably with you in my arms than with these said arms empty. I’m not a mother by nature, child, but I’m a mother in heart, and I’d uncommonly like to have the petting of you for a minute or two.’

‘Oh, would you really?’ said Lily.

‘Yes—that is, if you’d like it.’

‘Oh, I would—I would!’

‘Then come, child.’

In another minute Lily was lying warmly ensconced with her head pressed against Aunt Hannah’s shoulder. Her tears could not flow much longer in such comfortable quarters. Aunt Hannah

seemed to be the very essence of love and common-sense.

‘Now,’ said that good lady, ‘tell me where the others are. Where does “all sorts of places” mean?’

‘Well, Shirley and Patty and Miss Munro are at The Hilltop; they’re helping Honora Ffrench. They’re working very hard for the bazaar. And Shirley’s staying there altogether.’

‘And a right good thing,’ said Aunt Hannah. ‘The child needs variety.’

‘You love Shirley very much, don’t you, Aunt Hannah?’

‘Yes, my child, I do love her; she’s meant to be loved. She’s a very bright, sweet angel sent down by God to this world to make people happy. That’s what I take her to be.’

‘Oh, do you—do you? That’s what I think too,’ said Lily in a whisper.

‘Well, my child, you needn’t be ashamed of those thoughts; you share them with me. And where’s Julia, little Lily? Where’s my godchild?’

‘In the South Parlour,’ said Lily; ‘and she’s angry.’

‘Bless me! what for? She’s quite well again, isn’t she?’

‘She’s almost perfectly well, but perhaps she’s a little weak. I stayed with her, and she asked me if I’d like best to be with her or with Shirley.’

‘And you’—— said Aunt Hannah, her eyes twinkling.

‘Well, you know, Aunt Hannah, I couldn’t tell a lie, because father is—father is a clergyman—and I said I’d rather be with Shirley. So she’s

gone away, and she's very angry, and she doesn't want me to stay with her at all at present—perhaps never again. Oh, I'm very unhappy!’

‘And you'd like to be with Shirley?’

‘Yes; but I thought poor Julia’——

‘I see, child. Now look here, Lily. I'm very fond of Julia. She's a very nice girl, and a very good girl, but just at present she is going through a rather rough time; for she has always been a bit spoilt, you understand. She needs a lesson, and she must get it, and I'm not going to interfere in the ways of Providence. He means her to learn the lesson in the very best way possible. You behaved like a little brick when you stayed behind to-day, and now you shall have your reward. I've got my trap outside. Put on your very warmest clothes, for it has turned bitterly cold, and we'll drive straight up to The Hilltop, and I'll bargain that you shall have a share of the fun; and you can come back to-night with Miss Munro and Patty.’

‘Oh,’ said Lily, ‘it would be lovely! But Julia?’

‘I'll manage Julia. It won't have occurred to her that you are going to take her at her word. I'll have a talk with her that will put things straight. Now run off, little one; it's the best possible thing to do.’

So Lily left the room and rushed upstairs, trembling in every limb. She got into her warm little jacket, put on her fur cap, and ran downstairs again. A moment later, wrapped up in furs, she was seated by Aunt Hannah on the tall dog-cart, and Aunt Hannah was whipping up Reuben,

the fleet-footed horse, and Jim the groom sat erect behind, and away and away they flew.

Now, it so happened that as they were going away from The Grange, Julia, miserable, sulky, and a little self-reproachful, saw them from the South Parlour. What she would have done had Lily remained in the house she did not know. She could have borne very well the fact that her poor little friend was very sad and lonely, and perhaps weeping her heart out; but now that she saw her drive away under Aunt Hannah's friendly guidance she suddenly discovered that she missed her. It flashed through Julia's mind that she was a little hard on Lily, although she was very angry with the little girl for taking her at her word. She was so cross now that Lily was really gone that she sat down by the fire and burst into tears. Oh yes, what a sad, wretched life was hers now! And all because of Shirley!

CHAPTER XVI.

A WOULD-BE MARTYR.



UNT HANNAH did not take long to drive to The Hilltop. Lily was received with open arms by Honora and Patty, and conveyed straight into the dazzling, happy, fire-lit room where the girls were preparing the different things for the bazaar.

Having seen Lily right into this nest of love and comfort, Aunt Hannah whipped up Reuben and drove at a flying pace back to The Grange. There she desired her groom to take the horse to the stables for about an hour. When she entered the house it was still quiet and in solitude. Where were the family? Suddenly she remembered that Lily had said that Julia was in the South Parlour.

‘Poor little soul!’ said Aunt Hannah to herself. ‘Now, perhaps, it would not occur to anybody, but of all those girls at the present moment, the only one to be pitied is my goddaughter—poor, angry, jealous little mite, kicking as hard as ever she can against the pricks, and not considering that God meant her to be as happy as the day is long. I pray Providence will help me to say the right word to the child, but be angry with her I certainly shall not.’

It would be difficult for the hardest heart to resist Aunt Hannah when she was in what she called her melting mood. There were times when that good lady showed the rough, the bristly side of her nature. She was fond of saying that she had her rough side, and that those who tried her always found it out. She was also fond of declaring that this side was so unpleasant that any one who once got a touch of it never cared to feel it again.

But now Aunt Hannah was in her melting mood, and that was all comfort and all love. Julia, who had cried far more miserably than Lily had done, had now dried her eyes. She had declined to allow any lamp to be lit, and she sat before a dull fire, as sad a little girl as could be found in England.

‘Well, to be sure!’ cried Aunt Hannah’s cheerful voice. ‘How now, my lass? What a gloomy room! My word! is this the sort of way to get well? You’re moped, I take it, Julia. Let me ring the bell and order lights.’

‘Oh, Aunt Hannah, is that you?’ said Julia in the smallest, most melancholy voice. ‘But don’t order lights, please, for I’d rather be in the dark. It doesn’t matter whether I’m melancholy or not, does it, Aunt Hannah?’

‘Tut, tut!’ said Aunt Hannah. ‘Am I to have my way at the present, or are you? I want lights, the fire made up, and the curtains drawn; and I want a good, refreshing meal. I missed my tea; I hadn’t time to take it, and I’m going to have it now, and in the South Parlour. Where’s your mother, child?’

‘Mother has gone out to pay calls.’

‘And your dear, good father?’

‘I think he’s out too.’

‘Well, I know where the rest of the girlyies are, so there’s only you—just you—and I alone in the old house, godmother and godchild. I declare it’s my impression that we’re going to have a cosy time. Now, shall I ring the bell or not?’

Julia was silent.

‘Who is to be pleased—you or I? Now, give the matter your calm consideration, for if you prefer to think only of yourself, I will stay with you in the dark and—and starve. I’m madly hungry, but that doesn’t matter.’

‘Oh, please, Aunt Hannah, do think of yourself! Do ring the bell—yes, do. It doesn’t matter.’

‘But it does matter. It matters everything in the whole world, my hearty. You have chosen the better part of thinking of another—not yourself.’

Aunt Hannah pressed her finger against the electric button with vigour. Henry appeared and got his orders.

‘Build up the fire, Henry, draw the curtains, light that pretty lamp in the corner, and then bring tea for two—poached eggs, sardines, fresh tea, and bread-and-butter. Be as quick as ever you can.’

Julia tried to say something, but her voice could not be heard while Aunt Hannah was giving such vigorous directions. Henry bustled about with right goodwill. He coaxed the fire with little knobs of shiny coal, and finally made it blaze

with dry logs; and then he drew the curtains, lit the lamp, and cleared the table. In an incredibly short space of time tea was brought, and very delicious it was.

Now, Julia was still weak from her recent illness, and when she was at tea with Lily she was too worried and cross and wretched to eat anything. The sight, therefore, of fresh toast, and new-laid eggs beautifully poached, and fragrant tea, and thick cream was too much for her resolution.

‘Fire away!’ said Aunt Hannah. ‘There’s your place; this is mine. I’m starving, and I don’t mean to speak until my appetite is satisfied.’

Julia could scarcely keep up her melancholy in so cheerful a presence. By-and-by the meal was finished, and Julia had really eaten as much as Aunt Hannah. Then Henry removed the tea-tray, and there was a pause. Aunt Hannah, her face slightly flushed, her eyes twinkling, gazed straight at her godchild. Julia sat nervously twirling her fingers round and round in her lap. Presently Aunt Hannah spoke.

‘It doesn’t seem to me to be worth while,’ she said.

‘What do you mean, aunty?’

‘No, it doesn’t,’ repeated Aunt Hannah. ‘People can please themselves in this world. It’s the way of some people to trouble themselves, to be cross about nothing, to grumble when the sun shines and the earth brings forth her fruit—to grumble when God has showered good things on them. They like it, I take it. They adore being pitied. They are the would-be martyrs. I call them a

detestable class. But they exist; not a doubt of it—not a doubt whatever. They are very much to be despised, and not a bit to be pitied, for they can turn right round and be cheerful.’

‘I suppose,’ said Julia, trembling a little, and then raising her head and looking almost defiantly at Aunt Hannah—‘I suppose that is meant for me.’

‘Right you are, my hearty,’ said Aunt Hannah.

Julia’s eyes filled with tears.

‘I always thought,’ she began—‘I always thought you at least would sympathise.’

‘Bless you, child,’ said Aunt Hannah, ‘if you’d only come and sit in my arms! I had dear little Lily in them a short time ago. I comforted her, poor little lamb! just as I could comfort you too. You are not so very much bigger, when all’s said and done, and you are six times as silly—yes, six times—so I guess you want a fair amount of coddling. But now, child, let’s have a straight talk. What’s the matter with you, Julia?’

‘Aunt Hannah,’ said Julia, ‘I’ve known you all my life, and I have—yes, I’ve loved you. And I have known father and mother all my life.’

‘To be sure, my dear girl, seeing that they’re your parents. There’s nothing remarkable in that.’

‘And I never had a brother or a sister.’

‘You’re to be pitied on that score very heartily,’ said Aunt Hannah.

‘I used to think so myself. But if I had a sister or a brother, particularly a brother, he’d have a sort of right—I mean I couldn’t mind.’

‘Couldn’t mind what, my infant? You really are rather vague.’

‘I couldn’t mind if he was loved as much as I.’

‘But no one is loved in this house as much as you. I suppose you allude to that dear, gallant young Shirley and her nice friend, but especially to Shirley.’

‘Aunt Hannah, I hate her, and she—she is *not* nice.’

‘Come, Julia!’ said Aunt Hannah; and there was not the least doubt that at that minute the good lady was beginning to show her rough side. ‘I can bear a great deal, and I can have patience, for I understand what jealousy means and what envy means. If there are right-down low things, they are envy and jealousy, but I can stand both those great sins and be pitiful—as I hope my Heavenly Father will be pitiful to me—but what I can’t stand nor bear is what you have just said, letting out a hint, an innuendo, that that honest, fresh, bonny, good-natured girl is not what she seems. What does it mean, Julia? What does it mean?’

‘Nothing,’ said Julia, frightened for the moment. ‘I’m sorry I said it.’

‘That’s brave, my girl. I like you when you admit that you have done something wrong. And now, Julia, how much longer are you going to be miserable?’

‘I can’t help it. I do fight against it, but the moment I think I am conquering something fresh occurs.’

‘Well,’ said Aunt Hannah, ‘let us look facts in the face. Suppose you don’t conquer—and it looks uncommonly like it at present. We’ll suppose

that you are going on from bad to worse, that your little dislike has grown greater, and your contempt has got more powerful, and you hate your cousin. But whether you hate her or whether you love her, she remains here all the same. You don't get rid of her. Arrangements have been made that she should stay here for a year. At the end of that time, if she chooses, she may go elsewhere. She is a very rich girl; she has a great deal of money. But that is not the point; I only mention it to show that she can go where she likes, and wherever she goes she will inspire love. Well, we will suppose, just for the sake of argument, that you send her away. You have got to endure her for a good nine months longer—remember that in any case—but we will suppose that at the end of the nine months you have had your wish and Shirley goes. Do you suppose you will be any happier?’

‘Oh yes! of course I shall. It will be the old days back again.’

‘There you are wrong, Julia. The old days can never come back. In the old days your father and mother, your servants, your aunt, your friends far and near, did not know Shirley Kendal. They may have known of her existence, but that meant nothing at all. She had not entered into their hearts and taken them by storm. She had not been sweet and taking and gay and loving in their presence. There was *no Shirley* so far as they were concerned. That was the past. In the past there walked serenely a remarkably selfish little girl. Don't shrink, child; it's true. We

didn't guess your selfishness, of course, because it had not been proved. That little girl tried to gather up—and did gather up—a certain amount of success and a certain amount of love. Her father and mother loved her, and so did I. So did all her friends. But she was put into the world without the great fascination which has been given to Shirley, and she was content, knowing no better. Then Shirley came and all was changed. It was open-sesame, child, to a new world—a bright and glad and beautiful world. God meant this little girl to dance and play and sing and be happy in this new world. That was what He willed. He meant that the loving child who was sent to gladden her life should gladden it; that the love of Shirley should be to her as a very great and precious possession. But the child did not want it—— There! I am wandering away from the point. We will suppose that you, having cast away the blessing, find at the end of the year that Shirley chooses to go, and you think things will go to the old ways. But things never go back, Julia, and what we learn in this world we can never forget. Your father and mother would miss Shirley, and your friends would miss her, and they would compare you unfavourably with her. They would fret and pine, and you would see them fretting and pining. You would be unhappy yourself—far more unhappy than you are now.'

'You talk very dismally, Aunt Hannah, but I suppose'——

'What, child?'

‘Perhaps, after a fashion, you are right. I wish I could love her, but I can’t love one whom I can’t respect.’

Aunt Hannah rose to her feet.

‘Julia,’ she said, ‘I’m going home. You have pained me very much. Yes, you have. I don’t know what you mean, but Shirley is to be respected. I admire her more than I can say. She is a good girl—good and brave. I don’t talk now of her personal charm; a girl may be quite as good without that as with it. Sometimes she may be better, for a girl with the charm that Shirley possesses has no trouble in pleasing; it is natural to her—she cannot help herself. If she was only charming I should despise her, but she is good as well.’

‘If—if,’ said Julia eagerly—‘if it was proved—proved beyond doubt—that she was only charming—only just charming—would you forgive me then for having read her character aright?’

‘Really, Julia, I think you are a little off your head. I must talk to your father and mother. You are becoming possessed of a very naughty notion, and for my part I can’t stay any longer. You have disappointed me, goddaughter, and that is a fact.’

CHAPTER XVII.

AN AFTERNOON AT HILLINGBOROUGH.



N due course the bazaar took place, and immediately afterwards Shirley returned to The Grange. Lessons were now going on without interruption, and all the girls had busy times. Shirley and Patty found their languages all too easy, but they had to make up considerable leeway in English literature and history and other subjects which Julia had at her finger-ends. All the girls, therefore, spent very active, busy days, and ought to have been perfectly happy.

But it is a sad fact that when we allow a certain little green-eyed monster to take up his dwelling in the heart, he magnifies all things to his own proportions. Julia saw everything through his unholy glamour, and could not be contented or happy.

As the days went on she often looked at Shirley's blooming and happy face, and the thought would occur to her:

'If she only knew—if she only guessed—that Mrs Kendal, her own relation, came here and told me, oh, such a dreadful thing!—not the thing exactly, but that the thing existed—then would she look so happy, so contented? She is happy now because she fears nothing. I could change

all that. How Aunt Hannah hated me that day! But she will not hate me when she knows. Oh, she must know! They must all know. I am determined to gain possession of Shirley's secret.'

Julia thought so much of this secret that her very face seemed to alter in expression. She indulged in long musing fits; she often went away by herself. In the company of her father and mother, her cousin and her friends, she was silent. She was not exactly cross, nor did she complain, but she looked like a child who was more or less lost. There was nothing, however, absolutely to find fault with. She was quite respectful, and even affectionate, to her father and mother. She did her lessons, not brilliantly, but with care. Each allotted task was faithfully performed, only she let Shirley and the other girls more or less slip out of her life. Nevertheless, she was watching. She was waiting earnestly for an opportunity to gain possession of that dreadful thing.

The days flew by, getting shorter and shorter as the year hastened to its close. Even Christmas with its merriment did not rouse Julia to any enthusiasm. She was not specially noticed, however, in the rush of delight with which Shirley's presence filled the house. Shirley had never before spent a Christmas in England. She brought all her pretty foreign customs to the fore; and Patty, who had also lived a good deal abroad, helped her.

Christmas also went by, and the Christmas holidays came to an end. It was arranged, to Julia's satisfaction, that Lily was to stay with them for at least another term. Miss Munro had

come back, and the cold days of January were at their height, and still Julia thought of her idea. One day she spoke of it to Lily.

‘Come here, Lil; you and I have not had a long, cosy conference for some time.’

‘Oh no,’ said Lily.

She ran up willingly enough to Julia, and slipped her hand into her friend’s arm.

‘I know quite well,’ said Julia, ‘that you love Shirley better than you love me, but I’m not going to be cross about it. It isn’t worth telling a lie about it, is it, Lil? Keep your rosy little lips shut. I know it, and have accepted the situation. There was a time when the thought that even you had left me gave me considerable pain, but that is over. I have begun to recognise that a person can love two. You love Shirley with a great love, and you love me with a little. Nevertheless, Lily, it is I—I, Julia—I, the daughter of this house—who have given you your present happiness. It is I who have taken you up, and have induced my father and mother to keep you here. There are four girls in this house now—Patty and you and Shirley and I. This time last year there was only one girl. Ah, this time last year!’

‘Why do you speak like that, Julia?’ said Lily. ‘And why does your face get thinner and paler, and look—— Oh Julie, you look so white! We are very sad about you.’

‘Whom do you mean by “we”?’ asked Julia.

‘All of us—Shirley most of all. Shirley is very troubled.’

‘Don’t talk any more about that, Lily; I don’t wish it. Now see here. I have asked mother, and she has given leave. I want you to come with me to-morrow.’

‘Where?’

‘Miss Munro wants to go to Hillingborough. There’s a concert there—a very good one—and a special friend of hers is going to sing. She wants to hear her. I have begged of mother to let me go. Mother is quite agreeable; and I want you to come with me, Lily.’

‘Why, of course,’ said Lily. ‘I’d love to.’

‘Very well, then, that’s all right. Miss Munro, you, and I go to Hillingborough to-morrow.’

‘Yes?’ said Lily, in some wonderment.

‘And when we get there,’ continued Julia, ‘you will act as my friend?’

‘What do you mean by that? Of course I shall. Oh, speak!’

‘I won’t say anything beforehand; but at the time, if I ask you to do something for me—perhaps even to give up something for me—will you?’

‘Indeed, indeed I will.’

‘That’s all right. To-morrow morning, then.’

‘But aren’t the others to go?’

‘Don’t whisper it to them. I don’t want them to go. Shirley might—there’s no saying; she’s so passionately fond of music, and the concert is going to be a very good one. But she is not to go, Lily. As you love me, keep this secret to yourself.’

‘I will—I will,’ said Lily.

She ran off, feeling a little mystified.

‘What is the matter with you now, Lil?’ said Shirley half-an-hour later.

‘Nothing,’ replied Lily.

‘You look so very important—so very important!’

‘There is nothing the matter, really. I was talking to Julia.’

‘If only Julia would tell us what ails her, I could be as happy as the day is long,’ said Shirley. ‘I sometimes almost despair of ever winning her.’

Patty came up at that moment.

‘The only earthly thing to do,’ she said, ‘is this. Don’t take the slightest notice. Be very careful not to be unkind. Don’t be too affectionate to her parents when she is present. More you can’t do. You are bound to stay here for the present.’

‘Yes, I’m bound,’ said Shirley, and she gave a heavy sigh. ‘I don’t want to leave,’ she added. ‘If it weren’t for Julia I wouldn’t leave; but as it is, when the year is up I must go.’

‘Go? Where?’ asked Patty.

‘Ah! that I cannot tell; but I can’t stay here. She makes life too miserable for me.’

Tears filled Shirley’s eyes. Lily ran away.

The next day, early, Miss Munro announced her intention of going to Hillingborough. She further said that Julia was to accompany her, and that they were both going to take Lily to give her a treat; for Lily was nearly as fond of music as Shirley herself.

‘I don’t ask you, Shirley—nor you, Patty—to accompany me,’ said Miss Munro, ‘because I want

you to look after things at home; and in especial, Shirley, I want you to practise up that new piece on the piano. You can have the drawing-room to yourself for some hours, and you ought to make good way in overcoming its difficulties.'

Miss Munro spoke in rather a guarded tone. Shirley glanced at her in surprise, but made no remark.

By-and-by the comfortable brougham drew up at the door, and Miss Munro and the two girls entered. They drove to the station and took train for Hillingborough without adventure or incident of any sort. They arrived at the old-fashioned little town about twelve o'clock.

'Now,' said Miss Munro, 'I have some shopping to do, and you girls can take a walk up and down the High Street. We will lunch at the hotel at one o'clock, and be at the concert-hall in good time.'

'When does the concert begin, Miss Munro?' asked Julia.

'At two o'clock, dear. We have reserved seats, so we need not be in the hall until a quarter to two.'

Julia said nothing further. They had now reached the High Street, and Miss Munro began to execute her different commissions. The moment she was out of sight Julia turned to Lily.

'Lily, I want you to do something for me.'

'What is it?' said Lily, in some alarm.

'To come with me as quickly as ever you can. I want to see a person. It is most important; it is charity. She—she is a relation—a friend, I

mean—of Shirley's, and Shirley is not kind to her. You have to keep all this—every scrap of it—to yourself, Lily—yes, every scrap of it—never to tell a soul that you came with me to-day. I know, Lily, that whatever your faults, you keep your word, so I am asking you now to keep this great secret. Until you promise, I won't tell you where we are going, nor anything else. I'll leave you to pace up and down the High Street alone, and I'll go off by myself.'

'What am I to promise?' asked Lily. Her face was very pale.

'Why, this: you will never tell to anybody, under any circumstances—any circumstances, remember—that you know that Shirley has a relation in Hillingborough; and you will never, under any circumstances, let out that I have been to see her.'

'Well, I suppose it is no affair of mine,' said Lily, 'and you had much better go with me than go alone. But what do you want to see her for?'

'To give her money, poor thing! She is desperately poor.'

'That's very kind of you, Julia; but if she is Shirley's relation'——

'If? I tell you she is, child.'

'Well, if she is Shirley's very own relation, why shouldn't Shirley give her money?'

'Ah! that's for Shirley to decide. She doesn't; that's all.'

'But has she been asked? Have you asked her?'

'Indeed, no. Why should I?'

'Then why do you blame her?'

'That is not the point, Lily. We have no time to lose. Do you promise to respect my secret, or do you not?'

'I will respect it fast enough, but it puzzles me.'

'I want you to come with me, because it is more convenient to have you with me than to go alone; and I can't very well leave you, Lily, in the High Street. I wouldn't have brought you to-day, but Miss Munro insisted that one other girl besides myself should accompany her, and I knew you were the only one I could trust. Oh Lily! this means a great deal to me. Come along; do let us be quick.'

'I promise,' said Lily.

'You promise you will never tell?'

'Never.'

'Under any circumstances?'

'Under any circumstances.'

'Now say, "So help me God."''

'Oh! but, Julia, that can't be right.'

'Say it—say it; be quick! You do want God to help you to keep this very solemn promise.'

'So help me God,' murmured Lily, and she turned very white and trembled as she spoke.

'That's all right,' said Julia in a cheerful tone. 'You're a little brick, Lily; that you are. Now then, let us go as fast as ever we can.'

'But where are you going?' said Lily.

'To a place not far away—a place called Cumnor Street.'

'How do you know the relation will be in?'

'I wrote to her yesterday; she is sure to be in.'

‘Oh, you correspond with her, then?’

‘Now, shut up that wise little mouth, Lily. Remember, you are bound hand and foot by all that is solemn to keep my secret. The less you talk about it the better, for both our sakes.’

They soon arrived at Cumnor Street, a neat row of houses which stood a little way back from the High Street.

‘This is a very quiet, respectable place,’ said Julia. ‘I want you to stay outside while I go in.’

‘But I shall feel frightened.’

‘You can stay outside under one of the windows, and I will go and sit in the window and look out; and if you really want me you have only to look up at the window, and I’ll fly to you. Now, don’t keep me, there’s a dear child.’

‘Why mayn’t I come in?’

‘Oh Lily! you are full of whys, and I can’t answer all your little questions now.’

As Julia spoke she rang the bell of No. 12. The door was opened almost immediately by a slatternly woman with a great smut on her forehead. Julia said something in a low tone, and the woman nodded in reply. Then Julia entered the house. She was shown upstairs to a small drawing-room, which was badly kept and shabby; but there was some attempt at a poor sort of order, and the leno curtains which hung round the windows of the small bay were at least clean.

In a few minutes the woman who had called at The Grange to see Shirley appeared. She looked very eager and curious.

‘You got my letter?’ said Julia.

‘Yes, Miss—Miss Cairns, is it not?’

‘Miss Cairns,’ said Julia.

‘I got your letter this morning, miss. I stayed in on purpose and tidied up the place a little.’

‘Then this isn’t your own house?’

‘I rent the drawing-room and the back bedroom, miss.’

‘And your child?’

‘He is at school.’

‘Then he is better?’

‘Yes, miss; but, all the same, he’s but poorly.’

‘I have a very short time to stay,’ said Julia. ‘I want to ask you a few questions. You must answer them as fast as possible. Yes, I like to sit in the window, for there’s a little girl outside—a friend of mine—whom I wish to keep in sight. Please answer all my questions; it means money to you to be obliging.’

‘I’ll do the very best in my power, miss.’

‘First of all, then, has my cousin Shirley Kendal sent you any money since you came to The Grange?’

‘Not a penny-piece, miss.’

‘Although she faithfully promised and entered into a compact to do so?’

‘That’s the case, miss.’

‘You think, then, that she has forgotten?’

‘Either forgotten or she don’t wish to, miss; it’s much the same thing.’

‘But,’ said Julia, trembling a good deal, ‘would she be likely to forget if what you said that day when you were at The Grange is true?’

‘What I said that day, miss? What did I say?’

‘Be very careful now when you answer me, for I have five pounds in my pocket to give you in case you tell me just the very truth.’

The woman’s eyes glittered; her lips grew hard, and a watchful expression came over her face as she fixed her bright eyes on Julia. She looked towards the door. There was a strange new expression all over her face.

‘Five pounds is a lot of money, Miss Cairns, and I’m not the sort to despise it or throw away the chance of getting hold of it. There ain’t no doubt, miss, that I’ll do my level best to please you in all you say.’

‘It is quite simple,’ said Julia. ‘I wish to know your secret with regard to Shirley.’

‘My secret, miss?’

Now the woman did turn pale.

‘Yes; you told me that in the past Shirley—my cousin Shirley—your cousin Shirley—did something very wrong, something she was ashamed of, that she wanted to have hushed up.’

‘Oh miss! Poor young lady! it’s past and forgotten now.’

‘You haven’t forgotten it,’ said Julia, raising her eyes.

‘I don’t want to cast it against her,’ said Mrs Kendal. ‘She’s happy now; she’s well off. In your respectable family, Miss Cairns, every one likes her and looks up to her.’

‘Do you want five pounds or do you not?’ said Julia. ‘Time is passing. I will give it to you if you tell me that story about Shirley.’

‘You’re very young, miss, to be so bitter. Have you took a dislike to the young lady?’

‘That’s not for you to know. I want to know the story, and I’m willing to pay for it. If you’d rather not tell me I’ll go.’

Lily paused outside, and was looking nervously up towards the house. Julia felt on thorns. Miss Munro might have finished her shopping, and might be alarmed with regard to the missing children. Cumnor Street was almost too near the High Street. Her footsteps might be guided there. She might find Lily alone, and Lily, notwithstanding her sacred promise, might let out more than she intended. Julia stood up; she was no longer visible from the road below.

‘Is it yes or no?’ she said. ‘I must go off in a minute. Will you tell me or will you not?’

The woman hesitated, and seemed to swallow something.

‘You’ll never bring it up against her to do her mischief?’

‘I’ll make exactly what use I like of it.’

‘Then, miss, I think—I think I’d rather not tell you.’

Julia looked confused and disappointed.

‘Very well,’ she said coldly; ‘here’s five shillings. That’s all I can give you to-day.’

But the woman, whatever her antecedents, whatever her past, had to pay rent, had to buy food and to support herself. Five pounds would make all the difference between affluence and the direst poverty. She had a child, too, and the child wanted boots and better food.

‘Tain’t so much after all,’ she said apologetically; ‘and Shirley, she and her father were low down in the world at the time. For all they got so rich afterwards, they were low down then. I was, as I said, a relation, and they lived in the house with me; I took in boarders, and they had the drawing-room floor. It wasn’t a drawing-room like any of yours, but it meant the same. The thing happened in Rio in Brazil. I remember it was awfully hot weather, and Mr Kendal he was near desperate, down on his luck and all the rest. I think, too, he’d got into a money scrape. He used to speculate a power, and I think he must have lost money. Anyway, he wouldn’t lift his head even when Shirley put her arms round his neck and kissed him. She always had a wonderful way with her. She could draw love from any one. As to him, you can guess how he worshipped her. She was a little thing then, with marvellous hair, so thick and such a colour, and curling all over her head and shoulders. It was long, too—below her waist. I never saw anything like it. When she walked abroad in Rio the people used to stop and turn to look at her. For they’re mostly dark there—sallow complexions and black eyes and coal-black hair. And a girl like Shirley was like a bit of sunshine to them, with her hair all flame, and her complexion like lilies and roses, and her eyes so wonderful, full of a sort of look—oh, you know the sort, miss.’

‘I do—I do,’ said Julia impatiently. ‘But please go on—go on. What did she do?’

‘She was worriting about her hair like any-

thing, and saying it was much too hot for her, and that she was bothered with it, and she was always asking her father if he wouldn't take the scissors and cut it off. Nothing maddened him like that—nothing. Oh dear! he was a man of strong passions. Once she came to me with the scissors and says, "Cut it off; I can't bear the weight of it." I'd have done it but for him, but I was frightened, and that's the truth.

'Well, one day he was worse than usual, stamping, raving, swearing, and going on like a madman, threatening I don't know what. Shirley had been up with him the greater part of the night, petting him and loving him. Towards morning he got quieter and fell asleep, and she come in to me looking white as death, and she says:

"I've got him to tell me at last. A little bit of money will do it. There's a great speculation, and he may get back all that he's lost, and I'm going to help him."

"You can't do that anyhow, missy," I said.

'But she laughed and went out. She were gone about two hours, and when she came back again she was a sight to look at—her eyes and face as pretty as ever, but all her beautiful hair gone, cropped close to her head as though she were a boy. And she laughed and said:

"I know father'll be mad, but I couldn't stand the heat any longer, so I went to a barber and he clipped it off, and I'm well rid of it. And I've got some money for father."

'I asked her if she had sold her hair, and she laughed and asked me what I meant. I thought

maybe she had, for she seemed so wild and excited. Then she ran into her father's room. I waited on the landing outside. He raised his voice to scold her, and there was an awful pause; then he gave a laugh, and I looked through the chink of the door, and she was spreading the bed, on which he was lying, all over with money—Brazilian notes mostly. But anyhow they come to a lot—about five or six, or even seven pounds of your money. Her father started up and clasped her in his arms, and he said:

“I can buy the shares this minute, and I will;” and he rushed out.

‘While he was out there came people to the house—a shopkeeper—and, oh, there was a fuss! He said that missy had gone in and talked for a bit, and she was no sooner gone than he missed a valuable watch. He accused her of having stole it. She denied it, but he said she did it; he said he could prove it, that she had been standing by the counter, and the watch was close to her with a lot of others on a tray. He dared her to prove that she hadn’t stole it.

‘Well, she stood there as upright as you please, and as proud as though she were the best in the world, and denied it plump, and then told him to do his worst. Her father came back, and there was a great fuss; and they all said she had done it. She was had up, too, and tried before the magistrate, and it was proved—or they said it was proved—that she had stole the watch. But her father had got a lot of money back then, and he said he owed it to her; but she wouldn’t tell

any one where she got the money that had saved him. So he pacified the shopkeeper and gave him some money, and then we all moved away from Rio. It was not much too soon. Shirley kept on saying she hadn't done it, but she never would tell how she got the money, and so no one would believe her, and the friends who used to make a fuss over her wouldn't speak to her at all. Her father was angry with her, but she never budged nor showed one bit of repentance. That was her way. Her father died six months afterwards. It was on his deathbed he called her to him, and I heard him say:

"That was a tight place I was in that day, Shirley, and whether you stole the watch or whether you didn't, it was your money put me straight. I was just able to tide over, and then my luck turned, and now I am as rich as ever. But, all the same, you oughtn't to have stole the watch, child."

'Then she put her arms very tight round his neck and kissed and kissed him. And she whispered something in his ear. I don't know what she said, but as he was dying he blessed her and buried his head against her soft little neck. It was so he breathed his last. She never spoke of the matter from that day to this, but there is no doubt that she done it. She stole the watch; she's no better than a common thief.' The woman spoke with great excitement.

Julia's eyes were blazing. 'Thank you,' she said. She was trembling all over.

'You won't make mischief with it, miss?'

‘No, I won’t make mischief exactly,’ said Julia. ‘Here’s your five pounds. When you have spent it you shall have more.’

‘Thank you, miss. You won’t make this thing too hot for Shirley Kendal, even if you have given me the money, for she is a sort of relation of mine. I could say things about you that you wouldn’t like either, miss. You stole in here and tempted me to tell; that ain’t nice. Oh! I’m glad of the money,’ continued the woman, gathering it up into the palm of her hand and holding it tightly—‘I’m right glad of the money, but don’t you make mischief by Shirley. Times I hate her, and times I love her, and you was never tempted as she was, miss.’

Julia moved towards the door.

‘Thank you, Mrs Kendal,’ she said. ‘I shall be careful for both our sakes.’

She ran downstairs.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PATTY FEARS MISCHIEF.



JULIA, Lily, and Miss Munro arrived home all in good time. Miss Munro was enthusiastic about the concert, but Julia and Lily were both silent. Julia longed to be alone to think over the extraordinary story which Mrs Kendal had told her. Lily's conscience was troubling her a good deal; she had done distinctly wrong to make that promise.

When the two little girls found themselves in the house Lily touched Julia's hand timidly and said:

'Julia, I don't know what you were doing that time—you have got my promise, and I'll keep it—but if you mean to make mischief with regard to Shirley, why, I'd rather go home.'

'You can go, of course, if you like,' said Julia in a cold tone. 'I am not answerable to you for my actions.'

'Why do you speak to me like that? And why did you do what you did?'

'For my own reasons.'

'Then,' said Lily, 'I am to keep silence, and you are not going to tell me anything?'

'You had much better not know, Lily. Now,

do run away to your own room; I have a headache and want to be quiet.'

Julia entered her room. Shirley and Patty were both out; Mr and Mrs Cairns were nowhere to be seen. Julia was glad of this. She wanted a few minutes quite to herself.

Presently Heron thrust in her head.

'Miss Julia, can I do anything for you?'

'No, thank you, Heron.'

'You're not going to sit all alone in your room this cold day?'

'Please, Heron, take no notice. I have a headache and want to be quiet.'

'Then I'll put a match to the fire, deary.'

'You can do that if you like; only be quick. I want to be alone.'

Heron lit the fire, drew an arm-chair beside it, and left the room. When she got on the landing she stood still for a minute or two to consider.

'There's a queer change over Miss Julia,' she said to herself—'one I can't account for. I don't like the state of things, and I wish the old days were back again; and yet I don't,' she added, 'for no one who knew Miss Shirley would care for the time when they didn't know her.'

Julia drew herself close to the fire and stretched out her hands to warm them. She remained lost in thought. She had heard the story, certainly—a story in one way bad, in another—— But Julia would not look at the good side. She tried to shut away the great temptation, the agony of the child, who, even supposing she was guilty, could

not be compared to Julia herself, had she done such a thing.

'It's a weapon,' said Julia after a time, 'and I shall use it. She must go; there's nothing else for it.'

Presently she changed her things and went downstairs. The rest of the day passed without anything special occurring.

The next day came, and the girls went on with their accustomed tasks. Then Patty was suddenly called upon to leave The Grange. She cried when she left Shirley. She clasped her arms tightly round Shirley's neck, begging of her to send for her if anything went wrong.

'The fact is this, Shirley,' she said; 'you think yourself very happy—and in some ways you are—but I don't care for Julia's manner. I suppose she is quite a nice girl, but she's not my sort; I like girls who are open. If she'd say out what she feels I should not mind; but she doesn't; she's always brooding. She's planning something to your discredit; I know she is.'

'She may plan,' said Shirley lightly, 'but she won't succeed. Whatever I am, I have never done anything I am ashamed of.'

'No more you have, dearest—no more you have. You're a splendid girl, and all who really know you love you. But, Shirley, will you give me a promise?'

'What is it, Patricia? You know I'd do anything for you.'

'It's for yourself in one sense; it's a means of protection. There may come a time when you

will want some one to stand by you—some one who knew you in the past. If such a time comes, will you send for me? Wherever I am, I'll come to you.'

'I don't think such a time can come, dear Patty; and I am sorry you are nervous about me, for you haven't the slightest occasion. I shall win Julia yet—of course I shall. She will be forced to acknowledge that I'm not the sort of girl she imagines. It is just a case of jealousy—mere jealousy. But I make allowance for her; she has been spoiled until I came here.'

'Well, you'll send for me if you want me; that's the main thing.'

'If I can; but remember this house belongs to Mr and Mrs Cairns.'

'Oh, I'll manage them,' said Patty.

She left Shirley shortly afterwards and went into the study, where Mr and Mrs Cairns often spent their mornings.

'I am going after lunch,' she said as she opened the door.

'Yes, Patricia,' said Mr Cairns, 'and we are sorry to part with you. But come in, dear—come in.'

'And shut the door after you, Patty,' said Mrs Cairns; 'it is a very cold day.'

Patricia shut the door and came slowly forward.

'I want to know if, in case at any time Shirley wants me, I may come back.'

'In case Shirley wants you you may come back?' repeated Mrs Cairns.

'Why, of course you may, my dear—certainly!'

exclaimed Mr Cairns. 'In fact, Patricia, you have made yourself very pleasant to us, and all Shirley's friends are welcome. You have but to write to say you'd like to return and you will have a hearty welcome.'

'Thank you so very much; you are kind.'

Patty soon afterwards left the room. Then she went up to Miss Munro, who had been correcting exercises, and had just finished her task.

'Ah, Patty!' she said, 'we shall miss you when you are gone. I'm very sorry you can't stay longer.'

'I have to go to Egypt,' said Patty, 'to meet father and mother.'

'You'll soon find yourself in a beautiful climate, dear.'

Patty did not reply. Presently she said:

'Miss Munro, do you love Shirley?'

A look of enthusiasm flashed into Miss Munro's eyes.

'Love her! I should think I do,' she said.

'We all love her.'

'All of you don't love her. Julia doesn't.'

'Julia would love her if she wasn't jealous of her; but she will soon get over that.'

'Well, what I wanted to say is this,' said Patty. 'I think Julia won't get over this so soon. Sometimes, when I look at her face, I think that if she had a chance she would make mischief. Miss Munro, you must forgive me, but what did she do that day you took her to Hillingborough?'

'What did she do?' said Miss Munro. 'She went to a concert with me.'

‘But was she there all the time?’

‘No; the concert was in the early part of the afternoon. I did an hour’s shopping first.’

‘But did Julia do an hour’s shopping too?’

‘No; she and Lily walked up and down the High Street.’

Patty was silent, pondering over this information.

‘You happened to see them there?’ she said after a pause.

‘When I came out of Perrett’s, the milliner’s, she and Lily were standing close to the door. Why do you ask?’

‘Because,’ said Patty very slowly, ‘I have seen once or twice letters directed to her in a very illiterate hand, with the Hillingborough post-mark.’

Miss Munro was silent for a minute.

‘I think it must have been from some old servant or retainer,’ she said after a pause.

‘Perhaps so,’ replied Patty; ‘but somehow I don’t think those letters are written by an old servant or retainer.’

‘Then what do you think, Patty?’

‘I don’t know; I wish I did. I don’t like leaving Shirley. Will you look after her? Will you?’

‘I will, my dear. Really you have no cause to be alarmed. What could happen to her?’

‘Only that Julia hates her.’

‘Julia is a little girl; even if she hated her she would have no power to injure her.’

‘I hope I may be wrong,’ said Patty mournfully. ‘I have made Shirley promise that if she wants

me she will send for me, and dear Mr and Mrs Cairns have given me a most kind welcome. Miss Munro, will you send for me if you think Shirley wants me?’

‘I will, Patty — certainly. But what is your address?’

‘Write to father’s banker in London; the letter will be forwarded to me, wherever I am. If the matter is urgent, get the bankers to telegraph. You will, won’t you?’

‘I will, my dear girl; but I am sorry you are so anxious.’

An hour or two later Patty departed. Shirley looked sad as she bade her friend good-bye. She turned quietly and went back to the house. Lily was standing in the hall. Her face had a scared expression on it.

‘Why, Lily,’ said Shirley, ‘are you looking at ghosts?’

‘I’m always sorry when people go away,’ said Lily.

‘Well, it’s a right good thing we have you here. Come, let us dance up and down the hall.’

‘Oh yes, let us!’ said Lily, the colour coming back into her cheeks and her spirits reviving.

They were dancing madly up and down when Julia appeared.

‘You don’t seem very lonely without your friend,’ she said.

‘I’m desperately lonely, but this is the way I express my feelings,’ replied Shirley.

‘Heartless!’ muttered Julia under her breath.

She sank down on a low chair at one side of the hall.

‘Lily,’ said Shirley, ‘I’m going to teach you one of the Mexican dances; it is so pretty—so—so ravishing! Now you watch.’

Shirley held up her skirts so as to show her pretty feet and ankles, and then commenced a slow and marvellously graceful movement. At first she seemed scarcely to stir; then her small feet went faster and faster up and down the parquetry-covered hall. She danced and swayed her slight form until she seemed the very personification of graceful movement.

‘Oh, play, play!’ she cried. ‘Somebody play for me.’

Julia did not move.

‘Lily, you play—anything you know. Improvise something—anything. Begin—begin!’

Lily felt as though inspiration had entered into her. She rushed to the grand piano which stood at one end and began to play. Shirley stood near her for a minute; then her own fingers flew over the keys.

‘This way,’ she said. ‘Just a motion—give me motion.’

She was still dancing, and her hair had come loose from the comb which confined it, her cheeks were rich with colour, her eyes bright and laughing, when Mr and Mrs Cairns appeared.

‘What a picture!’ said Mr Cairns to his wife; and Julia heard the words.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GREAT COMPETITION.



ABOUT a month after the events related in the last chapter a most interesting and absorbing change happened in the lives of the girls who lived at The Grange. Lily was now considered in one sense part and parcel of the family. It had been arranged that, as Julia really loved Lily, she should have the benefit of her companionship for at least a year. At the end of that time fresh arrangements might be made, but at present Shirley, Julia, and Lily would all take advantage of Miss Munro's instruction.

Then came a change in every one's prospects, brightening all life at The Grange, and bringing a fresh and deep interest which would absorb all minds, tongues, and perhaps hearts.

The thing came about owing to Miss Munro. She went one day to have a talk with Mr Cairns.

'My pupils do very well,' she said. 'They are quite good girls. Shirley has many extraordinary qualities; but with regard to English history, literature, and grammar she is lamentably ignorant. She is smart, however, and can imbibe knowledge quickly. Julia, as you know, is exceedingly advanced in all subjects for her age; and Lily, who

is younger, is making good progress. Now, Mr Cairns, I know you don't approve of schools for girls'——

'I scarcely say that, Miss Munro,' he answered in his chivalrous and gentle manner; 'but for my girls I prefer home life and your tuition.'

He bowed to the governess as he spoke, and she coloured with pleasure.

'Thank you,' she said. 'It would be a sad day for me if you altered your opinion. However, I must be fair and just above all things. School has its advantages—the sense of competition, the desire of a girl to excel her companions'——

'But surely that can scarcely be good,' interrupted Mr Cairns.

'In one sense it is, for there can be a healthy sense of competition. There is no doubt that much can be acquired by such a stimulus. Now, the girls of whom I have the charge lack this stimulus in their education; there is nothing for them to compete for.'

Mr Cairns was silent for a minute; then he said slowly:

'You would not tell me all this if you had not a plan in your head.'

'Well, I have,' she answered. 'I have just received full particulars with regard to a remarkable competition which is given by a great paper. It is open solely to girls—girls of all classes and all ages up to twenty. The prizes are valuable, but in this case, except for Lily Bell, they are not of much consequence; the sense of stimulation, the sense of working for a given object,

would just do what the girls need. I have the papers here. The laws laid down are stringent. So much the better. What do you think of your girls joining the competition? If they do, they will have to answer certain papers under very strict conditions. The judging for the prizes will take place at midsummer. It is now the end of March. They would have exactly three months to compete. During that time all the young intellects will be stimulated to make the very most of their powers.'

'Did you say you had the papers here?' asked Mr Cairns.

'I have them with me, sir.'

'Will you leave them with me and let me look over them?'

'With pleasure.'

Miss Munro retired.

After breakfast the next morning Mr and Mrs Cairns sent for her. They asked her to seat herself, and told her that they had carefully studied the papers and had got a dim idea of the nature of the competition.

'It is certainly exceedingly broad,' said Mr Cairns. 'It embraces a knowledge of French and German, of English literature and English history, and of English composition. There will be plenty for each girl to do. The special period of English history and the special course of French and German are not fully declared in these papers, but on the whole, if you don't think it will overwork the girls, it might be well for them to compete.—What do you think, my dear?'

‘I dislike children being overworked,’ was Mrs Cairns’s reply. ‘I think we ought to leave it altogether to themselves. If they wish to compete, well and good; if not’——

‘I quite agree with you,’ said Miss Munro; ‘there would be no use in forcing the matter on the young people. Let them decide.’

‘Observe this special paper,’ said Mr Cairns, holding one up for Miss Munro to look at. ‘You see the very strict conditions with regard to the previous life and character of each girl who competes. She must have a clean record, and this record must be subscribed to by both her parents or guardian and the nearest clergyman or minister of whatever denomination the girl belongs to. That is essential; there must be no stigma in the past life of any candidate.’

‘Well,’ said Miss Munro, ‘that seems to me quite right. The reward is for girls who have hitherto led quite an honourable life. That part pleases me exceedingly,’ she continued; ‘and why should it trouble you, Mr Cairns?’

‘It doesn’t trouble me,’ said Mr Cairns, glancing at his wife. ‘Only our dear Shirley—our child whom we love as if she were our own—we don’t know her past life.’

‘You have but to declare solemnly that you know of nothing whatever against her—see the exact words,’ said Miss Munro. ‘Shirley, of all the girls under my care, is the most upright. Hers, of the three, is the most beautiful character.’ Tears filled Miss Munro’s eyes.

‘Yes, dearest,’ said Mrs Cairns, bending over and

taking up the paper, 'Miss Munro is quite right; there will be no difficulty in our attesting to our dear Shirley's worth.'

'Of course you are right,' he answered. 'I should perhaps have to communicate with some friends in Paris, and with some in South America; but, as you say, there is time, and the child is charming and quite worthy.'

'Will you, then, give the children permission to try?' said Miss Munro after a pause.

'I think we might.—What do you think, Charity?'

'I agree with Miss Munro that it would just contribute the necessary stimulus and give them all a delightful time,' said Mrs Cairns.

'Very well,' said her husband; 'I consent. Shall we see the girls now or later?'

'Perhaps it will be well for you to see them now,' said Miss Munro, 'for we ought to write soon for the papers, in order that the children may start the competition in good time.'

The girls were accordingly summoned, and all entered the library. Julia came straight up to her father in some wonder. Shirley dropped on a low stool by Mrs Cairns's side and laid her pretty hand on that lady's lap. Mrs Cairns could not refrain from pressing the little hand with a gesture of pure affection. Lily dropped into the nearest chair and glanced from Julia to Shirley with increasing wonder.

'What does this mean, father?' said Julia. 'We were all busy with our lessons when we were summoned. Miss Munro looks full of unutterable things. What is it all about?'

‘I will tell you, my dear,’ answered her father. ‘Shirley, my love, pray attend. Lily, this concerns you as well as the others.’

Mr Cairns then proceeded to explain to the girls as best he could the nature of the competition.

‘Success will mean an honourable mention which will be carried all over England, Scotland, Ireland, and perhaps the colonies,’ was his final remark. ‘The money reward, which consists of about two hundred and fifty pounds, would be immensely valuable to our friend Lily. You, Julia—and you, Shirley—would know what to do with it in case one of you obtained the first prize.’

‘Oh, Lily should have it with pleasure,’ was Julia’s answer.

‘I say the same,’ continued Shirley from her post by Mrs Cairns’s side.

‘Well then, you all consent to go in for it?’

‘I don’t know, father, that I care to,’ said Julia.

‘It would do you a great deal of good, Julie,’ said Miss Munro, looking at her pupil anxiously.

Julia’s expression had not improved, nor had her intellect. The frowns that came so often between her brows, and the peevish expression of her mouth, had taken from that sweetness which had been a characteristic of the little face. She looked anxiously now at Miss Munro; then she glanced at Shirley. Shirley’s position gave her a sharp pang of jealousy. She bent forward and took up one of the papers. It was the paper which specially applied to the rule that parents or guardian and the neighbouring clergyman should

attest to the absolute good conduct of the intending candidate.

'This paper needn't be filled in,' said Mr Cairns, taking it from her—'at least, not until the time when you send in the final papers.'

'We can write for the papers to-day,' replied Miss Munro.

'Certainly,' he replied.

'But it will have to be filled in, won't it, father, in order that I may compete?' said Julia.

'Yes, my love. There's nothing in your life you would wish to hide?'

Julia felt an uneasy pang pricking her conscience, but she said at once hastily:

'No, no—at least, I don't think there is anything.'

'This sort of thing only applies to open misconduct,' said her father, 'and has nothing to do with those small temptations, those small lapses into selfishness, which, I grieve to say, must occur in all poor human natures.'

'You, perhaps, Shirley, would like to read this paper,' said Julia gravely.

She crossed the room and put it into her cousin's hand. Shirley's eyes ran rapidly over it. She returned it calmly.

'You have nothing to say, have you?' asked Julia.

'No; nothing. I am not specially good or bad. I don't think there is anything that any one could mention absolutely against me.'

'Of course not, my love,' said her uncle. He looked with some disapproval at Julia.

The scene ended with all three girls consenting to compete, and Miss Munro, well pleased, hurried to her room to write the necessary letter.

Julia also rushed away to her own room. She shut the door and locked it. Then she began to dance up and down the room.

'The opportunity has come,' she said to herself. 'The proud Shirley will be openly disgraced. I didn't dare to tell, but now either I or Mrs Kendal will be forced to do so. Shirley, you may work as hard as you please; you are clever, but the prize will not be yours.'

The necessary papers for the competition quickly arrived, and all three girls set to work. There was hard work to be done, and a great deal of research was necessary. This research must be conducted without assistance. The days were now all too short for what was to be packed into them. Shirley enjoyed herself mightily. Hers was a keen and quick intellect. It had never been roused to its utmost before. The girls each worked for the competition alone. Each had her own desk, her own books of reference, her own papers. When her work was done she was requested to lock her desk and put the key away. Thus one would never interfere with the other.

Honora Ffrench heard of the competition, and decided also to join. She was now, therefore, oftener than ever at The Grange, and time flew on wings.

One day towards the end of April, Julia, after working hard for a couple of hours, shut up her desk, locked it, put the key on a little ring which she wore at her belt, and went out into the garden.

She had been working extremely hard for her, and had answered one or two questions, as she hoped, successfully that morning.

‘Do you like your work, dear?’ said her mother, coming up to her.

‘Yes, mother; I really quite enjoy it.’

‘I think it is doing you good. You look—not so pale as you did before. I was afraid you would find it too much for you.’

‘I enjoy it, mother.’

‘It doesn’t give you a headache?’

‘No, mother; I’m not so delicate as all that.’

‘And does Shirley enjoy it?’

‘I really can’t say.’

‘She looks as though she did.’

‘Mother, we are alone just for a few minutes; need we talk of Shirley?’

‘Oh Julie! it is a pity—— When will you get over your jealousy?’

‘When it is not remarked upon, and when somebody else besides Shirley engrosses your attention.’

‘It is unkind of you, Julia, to talk like that. I am quite sure that no little girl could be more loved than you are. And as to Lily—— But you are not angry when I talk of Lily.’

‘Of course not. You speak of her in a very different tone.’

‘Because she is a different sort of girl.’

‘Quite as nice, mother, and very nearly as pretty. And—oh, if you only knew—if you only knew!’

‘What do you mean by that, Julia?’

‘Nothing, mother—nothing—at least, nothing as yet. Only you may well love dear little Lily.’

‘Who is that person coming down the avenue? I don’t seem to know her,’ said Mrs Cairns.

Julia looked up. The colour rushed into her face, for she recognised Mrs Kendal from Hillingborough. Mrs Kendal was walking slowly down the avenue, holding her little boy by the hand.

‘I have seen her already,’ said Julia. ‘I will go and speak to her.’

She rushed up the avenue, and her mother watched her as she talked very earnestly to the shabbily dressed woman. ‘Who could her friend be?’ she thought. But then she said to herself:

‘I must not watch her too closely, dear child. The woman is probably one of our old retainers. Julia was always very good to them—always.’

Meanwhile Julia was angrily questioning Mrs Kendal.

‘Why have you come here?’ she said. ‘You know I told you you were not to come.’

‘I thought I’d like to see Shirley.’

‘You can’t see her. If you do I’ll never give you any more money—not another penny.’

‘Ah! I want it very bad. You haven’t sent me anything for a fortnight.’

‘You demand so much; all my pocket-money is used up.’

‘Shirley has plenty of money. If I were to see Shirley she’d give me twice as much as you do.’

‘You contradict yourself dreadfully, my good woman,’ said Julia, in some anger. ‘You know that when you first came here Shirley had ceased to pay you, although she had promised to do so.’

'Yes, yes; but she'd have given it to me long before now. You're very hard on me, miss, and I'm always in such a fright for fear you'd do a mischief to Shirley.'

'Well, have I done her any mischief yet?'

'No; but you look as though you would.'

Julia laughed. 'Look here,' she said. 'Go away; go straight away this minute, and I'll send you ten shillings by post.'

'That won't do, Miss Cairns. I can't possibly do with ten shillings; I must have at least a pound.'

'A pound?' said Julia. 'I haven't got a pound.'

'You can borrow it, miss—a rich young lady like you.'

Julia saw her father approaching.

'Yes, yes, I'll send it; I promise,' she said. 'Perhaps I'll send you more. Perhaps by-and-by I'll have to come and speak to you; and if that happens I'll give you a lot more. Anyhow, you shall have a pound by to-morrow morning.'

'Very well, miss.'

'That's if you hurry off—if you go very quickly, and are out of the avenue before my father comes up.'

The woman looked in Mr Cairns's direction; then she looked at Julia; finally she turned her back and went slowly up the avenue.

Miss Munro, who had come out of the house, now joined Mr Cairns in his walk. Mr Cairns called out to Julia:

'Julia, who was that woman you were talking to?'



'That won't do, Miss Cairns. . . . I must have at least a pound.'

G. C.

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'An old servant of ours,' said Julia, telling the nearest lie that could save her from present trouble.

'An old servant? Who?'

'Mary Anderson. You remember she married and lived in Hillingborough.'

'I don't remember at all. I'll ask your mother. Lives in Hillingborough? What did she want here?'

'Only to talk to me for a minute or two.'

'Then, my dear child, why in the name of hospitality didn't you ask her down to the house? The housekeeper could have given her something. And she has a little boy, too. Poor little fellow! he must be very hungry. Couldn't you run after her, Julia, and tell her to go down and have some dinner with the servants? I hate to think that our respectable old servants should not have a welcome when they visit us.'

'She is too far off, father; she is quite out of the avenue. And she was in a great hurry; she wanted to get back.'

Miss Munro listened without saying anything. She had an uncomfortable memory with regard to some words Patty had spoken.

By-and-by the three went into the house. Julia was distraught and felt miserable. Could she have undone the past now she would gladly have done so. But one glance at Shirley, who was sitting near Mrs Cairns, now and then talking to her, now and then smiling into her face, brought back the old feeling of mad jealousy.

After lunch, however, she had something to do. It so happened that, well as she was supplied

with pocket-money, at the present moment she only possessed five shillings. She had been lavish in her expenditure for some time. Now, the fact was that Mrs Kendal was draining her of all her available resources. Julia did not call Mrs Kendal's action in any sense of the word by the ugly term 'blackmail.' She only supposed that she herself was creeping towards a really trustworthy action. Sin, wrong-doing, must be punished; the guilty must be exposed. The way to do this was through Mrs Kendal. Surely Julia was doing right? Somehow to-day, however, she felt all over her little frame that she was doing wrong. Her hand trembled; her head ached. She longed to fling herself on the floor and cry, cry, cry. But she dared not do so. She had to get the money; it was all-important. Mrs Kendal was in the position to betray Julia, and to be betrayed now would mean disaster. She could not contemplate such a state of things for a moment. She must find her father and beg of him to advance her a couple of pounds of her pocket-money. Rich as he was, he never cared to do this. He liked to feel that his daughter understood the value of money. He made her a liberal allowance of two pounds a month to meet her different needs. He had paid her two pounds a week ago. There was nothing due to Julia for three weeks. She must get her pound, however.

She went into the study to look for him. He was nowhere in sight.

'What is it, dear?' said her mother. 'Why aren't you out with the others?'

'I want to see father. It is something important.'

‘I’m sorry, my Julie, but he has gone over to Aunt Hannah’s, and will not be back until time for late dinner.’

Julia knew that the post would go two or three hours before that event. This would never do. She stood still for a minute reflecting.

The way of transgressors is unquestionably hard, but in one sense the way of transgressors is easy: it means such a very down-grade that the victim does not know how fast he or she is slipping. In one instant it came into Julia’s head to cover her own conduct with what was partly a lie and partly the truth.

‘I wanted father to lend me some money,’ she said.

‘What for, dear?’ asked her mother.

‘Oh mother, will you lend it to me?’

‘But, my child, your father paid you a week ago.’

‘I know, but I have been a little indiscreet. I owe a bill for paper and books at Hillingborough. I have an account, and I ought to pay it.’

Julia really had an account at the bookseller’s in Hillingborough; it amounted to eleven shillings. It was not troubling her in the least, but she seized on it now as an excuse.

‘Yes, I have an account at Jones’s,’ she said, ‘and I want to pay it.’

‘Well, darling, you shall do so next time we go to Hillingborough. Your father is sure to go there one day this week.’

‘But, dear mother, I have spent my money;

please don't ask me how or why. It is my little secret, mothery; don't try to get it from me. I have spent my money, and I want some more. Can't you lend it to me—even a pound, mammy darling—even a pound?'

'But, Julia, you know your father's wishes. He gives you a very liberal allowance. You are a very young girl to have ten shillings a week.'

'But father doesn't pay me weekly. I wish he did.'

'I don't understand you, Julia. When last we talked over your little money affairs you said you had a good deal put by.'

'I've spent it,' said Julia desperately. Her face was changing from white to red. 'Mammy,' she said suddenly, 'won't you trust me this once? I—a great many things have happened that make me not too happy. Won't you trust me?'

'Well, child, I suppose I must. How much do you want?'

'A pound—yes, just a pound. I'll pay you the next time father pays me.'

Mrs Cairns put her hand into her pocket and took out her purse.

'Don't ask me for it again,' she said. 'Your father will be displeased; I know he will.'

'But must you tell him?'

'Certainly. If you require this to be a secret between us, I shall take the money back again.'

'No, no, mammy; of course not.'

Julia paused for a moment to kiss her mother; then she dashed out of the room.

'So far so good,' she thought to herself. But

she could not send a sovereign through the post to Mrs Kendal. Stay, though! she had heard of money being sent in bread. Could she not do so? It was worth risking. She could not possibly make the excuse to walk to the village to get a postal order. If she put a sovereign in bread, and folded a piece of cardboard on each side of it, she could slip the whole into an envelope, seal and direct it, and wait in the shrubbery for Pat the postman. As he was going by she would dart out to him and give him the letter.

‘If I give him twopence for himself he’ll be very glad to do it,’ thought the girl. ‘He’d be certain then to post my letter.’

She rushed up to her room. Heron was standing there arranging some things.

‘Heron, can you get me a piece of thick bread?’

‘What for, miss?’

‘I want to give some of it to the parrot by-and-by.’

‘Very well, Miss Julia—when I go downstairs. How thick do you want it?’

‘Oh, a nice thick piece—a piece of crumb. The parrot prefers crumb.’

‘Shall I leave it outside the animals’ room, or must I bring it up to you here?’

‘Bring it up to me.’

‘I thought you hated the parrot, miss.’

‘No; I am learning to love him. I wish you wouldn’t question me about everything, Heron; it makes me feel so cross.’

Heron said nothing more. She continued her arrangement of Julia’s under-linen. When she had

quite finished she moved towards the door in the deliberate way which is so annoying to impatient girls. Julia felt that she longed to push her out of the room.

'Don't forget the bread,' she called as Heron turned the handle of the door.

'No, miss,' replied the maid.

'Now, what queer fad is this?' thought the good woman as she went down the corridor and, opening the baize door which led to the kitchen regions, descended slowly. 'Miss Julia gets odder and odder. Bread for the parrot, indeed! She, who never took the least bit of notice of the poor thing! Well, wonders will never cease.'

Heron appeared in the kitchen.

'Cook,' she said, 'I want a thick piece of stale bread, and at once, too.'

'Whatever for now?' asked the cook, who was busy making the pastry for late dinner.

'I can't tell you what for. Will you give it to me and not ask questions?'

Cook grumbled. 'You're always bothering round when I'm busiest,' she said; but she went to the great jar where she kept the loaves of bread, cut a thick slice, and gave it to Heron.

Heron went back with it to Julia's room.

'Here's the bread, Miss Julia,' she said. 'I hope to goodness that you have no ill meaning with it. I don't know you these times, my dear.'

'You are very suspicious and disagreeable,' said Julia; 'but thank you, all the same, for the bread.'

Heron left the room. Now Julia was alone; now she could lock her door, write her letter, and

get the load off her mind. It was a heavy load; she had to acknowledge that. It was becoming so broad, so weighty, so all-enveloping, that the mere jealousy of Shirley was lost in the anguish of trying to do her an injury.

‘What am I made of?’ thought Julia. ‘Shall I ever be the girl I used to be again?’

She wrote a very hasty letter to Mrs Kendal:

‘Here is the money, and please don’t come on any account to The Grange again. Write if you must write, but don’t come to The Grange.’

Even Mrs Kendal’s letters were becoming a source of fear and terror to Julia. She knew that in the end she must make some arrangements by which the letters would not be handed to her across the breakfast-table.

Having finished her letter, she made a slit in the bread, slipped in the sovereign, placed two little boards one at each side, and put the whole into a large envelope. She addressed it, and the stamp was then added. So far all had gone well, and all that was to be done was to wait in the shrubbery until Pat went by.

It seemed to Julia that everything was against her, however, for when she went downstairs Lily scampered up to her in wild spirits.

‘I have answered another question. I have—I have!’ she cried. ‘Oh, suppose I get the scholarship! Suppose I get the money! No girl will ever have been so happy in all the world before.’

‘You know quite well, Lily,’ said Julia, ‘that there are three girls working on your behalf—

yourself primarily, then Shirley, then I. You ought to come in for something, little Lily, for we are about as clever as most girls of our age.'

'You are so delightfully good; that is what charms me,' said Lily.

'What are you doing now, Lily? It's rather late for you to be out.'

Julia was casting anxious glances towards the house. Pat generally left on his way to the post about five o'clock. It was a quarter to five now. Lily had been suffering from a cold and cough for some days, and Julia endeavoured to make the worst of things.

'The doctor has been,' said Lily, 'and he said my cough was miles better, and that I ought to be out in the open air as much as possible. Why, what is the matter? Do you want to get rid of me?'

'No, no, no! But I see Pat. I forgot to post a letter. I must run to him.'

'Julia, let me; I can run twice as fast as you can.'

'No, child; and don't follow me.'

Julia turned such a very cross face in Lily's direction as she uttered the last words that the little girl stopped and looked after her in some amazement.

'I don't know why I am sometimes frightened about things,' thought Lily to herself, 'but I am. And I think the person who really frightens me is Julia. Ever since that day we spent at Hillingborough I have not felt quite at ease. But of course there is nothing really wrong. Julia is much less angry with dear old Shirley than

she used to be. Things have been going better, especially since we started on our competition. It was a very good thought of Miss Munro's.'

Shirley appeared walking under a long vista of beech-trees which were just coming into leaf. Lily flew to her side.

'Where's Julia?' said Shirley.

'Talking to the postman,' replied Lily. 'Ah! there she is. Come and meet her.'

'I won't wait for her,' said Shirley. 'I want to see Aunt Hannah. I am on my way there now. If she keeps me for the night you needn't any of you be frightened. Aunt Charity knows.'

'You'll find Mr Cairns there, possibly.'

'Well, that won't matter.'

'Are you going to walk or ride or drive, Shirley?'

'I'm going to walk on these two little pegs, Lily dear. Now, please don't keep me.'

Shirley turned immediately and began running and walking up the avenue. Soon she disappeared from view over the crest of the hill.

Julia came back to Lily.

'Where is Shirley going?' she asked.

'To visit Miss Jeffries. She says she may not be back to-night.'

'I wonder,' said Julia after a moment of impatience, 'when Shirley will leave off those terribly independent ways of hers. Other girls living, as she does, in the house of their relations would ask permission, or at least tell their plans beforehand.'

'Oh, she's all right,' said Lily. 'Let's talk about the competition.'

‘Why do you speak to me in that tone? Do you like me never to speak of Shirley?’

‘I like to talk of the competition better. I am terribly in earnest about it.’

‘Well, let us talk of it. I wonder when the next set of questions will arrive.’

Julia felt relieved and happy in her mind. She had overcome the difficulty; for the present at least her conscience did not trouble her.

Meanwhile Shirley continued her walk. She was a splendid walker, and she much enjoyed the exercise. She got to Miss Jeffries’ house just as that good lady was saying good-bye to Mr Cairns. He started when he saw Shirley.

‘My dear girl,’ he said, ‘you are rather late. I am just going home.’

The tall dogcart was at the door. The groom was holding the mare, which was very fresh and impatient to start.

‘I am not going back with you, Uncle Stephen. I have just come to have a long, long talk with Aunt Hannah.—Aunt Hannah, can you send me home to-night, or may I stay with you all night?’

‘I will send you home, little girl. Susan shall walk with you. I have not a bed handy, or you should stay with all the pleasure in the world. But we are spring-cleaning, and the place is a considerable bit upset. You don’t mind having your dinner with me in the red kitchen, do you, Shirley?’

‘No, of course I don’t,’ replied Shirley.—‘All right, Uncle Stephen, I’ll be back before you lock up. Good-bye—good-bye.’

She kissed her hand to him, and followed Miss Jeffries into the house.

'We dine in a quarter of an hour, Shirley. You know my dinner-hour doesn't keep fashions.'

'I'm glad of it,' said Shirley. 'I was so relieved when the thought of visiting you came to me that I hardly took any tea, so I shall be quite ready for your delicious, out-of-the-common dinner.'

The 'out-of-the-common dinner' on the present occasion was a freshly boiled ham, which appeared on the table flanked by innumerable spring vegetables, asparagus, sea-kale, and spinach.

'I never eat anything else when I can get the chance of a cut from a newly boiled ham,' said Aunt Hannah. 'I cured this myself from a recipe handed down to me from my great-grandmother. I don't suppose there is a ham in the whole of England that could beat mine for flavour.'

Aunt Hannah helped herself and Shirley. The ham was followed by a confection of fruit; then there was delicious coffee, and the simple meal came to an end.

'I wish every one was like you, Aunt Hannah. I wish every one in all the world took you as a copy,' said the girl, looking at the wrinkled and aged face almost with reverence.

'Ah, Shirley, child! I'm not a pattern to be copied. I have my failings, the Lord knows; but I am reaching the summit of the hill, Shirley, and the sunshine from the other side seems sometimes to glint over me. That fact makes me humble and glad and thankful and all the rest.

It seems to rub your bits of tempers out, and your bits of selfishness. You will find it out too, my little girl; but you are down in the valley as yet—and a beautiful valley too, child—the Valley of Youth and Hope. Only you must climb, little Shirley—you must keep on climbing.’

‘I know,’ said Shirley. ‘Shall we go into the parlour, and will you hold my hand, and will you talk to me?’

Aunt Hannah saw that Shirley was very much in earnest. She wondered what was troubling her. She had a great deal of tact, however, and never questioned when questions were unnecessary.

Soon they established themselves in the pretty little parlour, where a fire was crackling merrily in the grate, and the shade of the lamp cast a pleasant glow over old woman and beautiful girl.

‘Now then, Shirley,’ said Aunt Hannah, ‘you have come to unburden yourself, I take it. Tell me just what is troubling you, my love, and I’ll give you the best advice I can; and even if I cannot advise you, I can sympathise. Sympathy often means a deal more than good, hard advice, my little girl.’

‘Yes,’ said Shirley, ‘that is so. Well, I have one or two things to be anxious about. There’s something I want to consult you on.’

‘Julia? The old trouble?’

‘No, it has nothing to do with Julia now—or at least not much.’

‘Well, tell it to me, and then we’ll decide.’

Shirley hesitated for a moment.

‘It has to do with Julia and it has not,’ she said then. ‘It was only to-day that I saw her. She was in the avenue, and she was talking to Julia.’

‘Now then, child, what are you driving at? I hate anything in the nature of a mystery; I like plain-spoken words. Who in the name of fortune was talking to Julia?’

‘A woman called Kendal—Lydia Kendal. I used to know her long ago. She married a very distant cousin of my father’s; and once we lodged with her. It was a long time ago. She isn’t a good woman. I gave her money once, but she spent it, I am afraid, in drinking too much. She is not a nice woman, and I can’t imagine why Julia knows anything about her. I gave her up; it may have been wrong of me.’

‘You must tell me more about this, Shirley. At present I fail to understand.’

‘Well, Aunt Hannah, it was this way. When I was a very little girl father and I lived for a whole year in Rio in Brazil. I don’t want to tell you all about the foreign ways, or anything of that sort, for they have nothing to do with this story. I was not more than eleven years old at the time, and I was very wild and unmanageable. Yes, I was, Aunt Hannah. You see, I never had any one to keep me in order. Father wouldn’t dream of it, and there was no one else. So I did just what I liked, and I think the only good thing about me was my love for father. There was nothing I wouldn’t do for him. I loved father—he was alive and well, and

vigorous and handsome—and I loved mother, who was in heaven and an angel. At night when I lay down to sleep I saw a picture of mother in my mind. She was standing in her white dress, with all the rest of the angel choir, playing sweet music on her harp, and singing very sweet and low, and yet with a voice that must have penetrated everywhere. I can't tell you what those pictures were to me. I would often cry myself to sleep.

‘Well, one day we came across this Mrs Kendal. She came to father and cried very bitterly. Now, father was never what you'd call a soft man. Indeed, he was a very fierce and passionate one, and I think all the people who knew him were afraid of him—all except me. Of course, I never knew a scrap of fear with regard to him; only I wouldn't willingly hurt him, because I loved him so much. Well, Lydia Kendal spoke to father and told him that she was the wife of his cousin. She was a widow, and had a wee baby of about two months old. And she asked father if he would come and lodge in her house. She let all her rooms to lodgers except the kitchens. She slept in the back kitchen with her baby. Father said we might as well oblige Cousin Lydia, and so we went. She wasn't at all nice even then. She often used to take too much to drink, and she wasn't kind to her baby. I couldn't bear her. Afterwards we all went to Mexico. A good many things happened while we were there. Amongst others, father died. Oh, I don't want to think of that! When father died Cousin Lydia

had a talk with me, and asked me if I would continue lodging with her. I said that I didn't wish to, and that father had given me directions that I was to travel in the care of a lady who was shortly going to Europe, until I met my aunt Bridget, who was going to adopt me and give me her money as well as what father was leaving me.

'Cousin Lydia had a long, long talk with me. She told me how poor she was, and how much she wanted the money that I should pay her, and she begged and implored of me to stay with her. But I wouldn't stay, for father had said I wasn't to. Then she threatened me. It was the most ridiculous threat you ever heard of. I won't tell you about it, because it was false from beginning to end. But she had a most bitter, bitter tongue, and she said she'd do for me. Wasn't it dreadful of her? I was quite a young girl, between eleven and twelve, at the time. In one way I was no match for her, and if it had not been for the fact that father had arranged that I was to go with the lady who was soon leaving for Europe, I might have been influenced by her. But I was firm, and declined to live with her. Then she talked and talked to me, and begged me to give her money. I said I would for two years give her a pound a week, but that I wouldn't do more than that. I thought she could support herself quite well if she tried. The fact is, Aunt Hannah, she was a very lazy woman, and never would do much for herself. She was always

living by begging-letters, and by trying to get people to give her money. I thought a pound a week for two years as much as I ought to give her. I told Aunt Bridget about it, and Aunt Bridget agreed with me, and when the end of the two years was up she dictated a letter for me to write to Cousin Lydia. I did write it, and I told her that I was not going to give her any more.

‘For a long time—nearly a year—I heard nothing about her. Then one day I got a letter from her. It seemed that she had followed me, and was staying in Hillingborough, which is not far from here. I didn’t even answer her letter, for Aunt Bridget had told me to take no notice of her. Then she wrote again and threatened me in such a foolish way. But of course I wasn’t a scrap afraid of her.

‘Now, I have come to you because I think she has discovered Julia and is talking to her about me. There is not the slightest doubt that Julia met her to-day in the avenue. I don’t want to tell Aunt Charity nor Uncle Stephen, but I thought I’d just come straight and tell you, Aunt Hannah.’

‘And you have done very wisely, my dear child. I have always admired you, Shirley, and now I see you are the essence of good sense. It isn’t every young girl who would behave so judiciously with regard to a woman of this Mrs Kendal’s type. I seem to see her before my mind’s eye—just the sort of woman who’d do a lot of mischief if she could, but luckily can’t, owing

to your upright and plain-speaking character, my dear.'

'Well,' said Shirley after a pause, 'I don't think she can do me any harm, and I don't see why she should, but I am putting it into your hands.'

'What do you want me to do, Shirley?'

'Well, perhaps the best thing would be for you and me to go and see her. Would you greatly mind?'

'Not a bit of it, Shirley, if you really think it best.'

'I think I ought to be with you, and you ought to be with me. I might say or do something injudicious if I were all alone. And you might want to ask me questions, for there is no saying what this woman will say about me.'

'We'll go together, Shirley. Do you know her address?'

Shirley gave it.

'We will go to-morrow,' said Aunt Hannah. 'There's no time like the present.'

'How sweet of you, dear Aunt Hannah! But you are house-cleaning.'

'Let the house-cleaning wait, child. The house won't run away, and a woman like that may do a great deal of mischief. Besides, we must discover what relations she has established with my little Julie.'

Shirley stayed for some time longer; then she took her leave. Susan was waiting to escort her back to The Grange.

'I'll call for you to-morrow morning at eleven

o'clock,' said Aunt Hannah. 'I'll bring the dog-cart with me, and we'll drive straight to the railway station and get to Hillingborough a little after twelve. Then we'll go at once and see this woman.'

'Ought I to write beforehand?'

'No; much better not. We must take her by surprise.'

'Suppose she is out?'

'We'll wait till she comes in. You say she has a child; she won't leave the child long. Even at the risk of finding her out and having to wait for her return, I don't want to put her on her guard by writing to her.'

'Very well, Aunt Hannah; I trust to you altogether in the matter.'

Shirley walked home by Susan's side, feeling quite in good spirits, and being sure that things must come right in the end now that Aunt Hannah had taken up the matter.

It was arranged between the old woman and the young girl that none of the family were to know anything about what was to take place. When Shirley got in that night Julia and Lily had already gone to bed. Mr and Mrs Cairns received her kindly, and soon afterwards she went up to her own room.

CHAPTER XX.

AUNT HANNAH INTERVIEWS MRS KENDAL.



THE next day the girls were busy at their lessons as usual when, sharp to half-past ten, Aunt Hannah's dogcart was seen to drive up to the door. The schoolroom window had a full view of the porch, and instantly three restless young creatures crowded to the window to see who had arrived.

'Aunt Hannah! What can she want?' said Julia.

'I think she wants me,' replied Shirley, colouring.

'Oh,' said Julia, fixing suspicious eyes on her cousin, 'did you arrange this with Aunt Hannah last night?'

'I did, Julia—or, rather, Aunt Hannah arranged it with me.—Miss Munro, may I go, please?'

Miss Munro looked slightly annoyed.

'The lecture I was about to give you with regard to the Court of Charles I. is somewhat important,' she said, 'and I worked up the particulars with great care. But never mind; if you are really wanted you can see my notes afterwards. It is a pity for you to miss the lecture, as it relates to one of the questions you will have to answer for the competition.'

Just then a servant knocked at the door, entered, and said that Miss Jeffries was waiting for Miss Shirley, and would be glad if she would be quick.

'Yes,' said Shirley; 'Aunt Hannah wants me to go with her to Hillingborough.'

She could not resist making this remark, and as she did so she glanced in Julia's direction.

On hearing the word Hillingborough, Julia started quite perceptibly and the colour flew into her face. She was so *distracted* for several minutes after Shirley left that she could scarcely attend to her work. Miss Munro had to speak sharply to her.

'Really, Julia, you may as well give up trying for the prize if you will not attend to what I am saying.—Now, Lily, answer the question I have just put.'

Lily answered it creditably and in pretty words.

'Julia, what did I say just a minute before?'

Julia did not know.

Miss Munro inwardly prayed for patience, and then went quietly over the portion of history she was studying with her pupils.

Meanwhile Aunt Hannah and Shirley were driving rapidly to the railway station. They took the next train to Hillingborough, and arrived very soon after twelve o'clock.

They went straight to Mrs Kendal's address. On inquiring for her, they were told that she was out, but would be in again in a few minutes. Aunt Hannah in a very polite voice asked the slatternly woman if they might walk up to Mrs Kendal's room and wait for her. Permission was given, and

they soon found themselves in the shabby drawing-room which Lydia Kendal occupied.

‘Oh, it is so like her!’ said Shirley, glancing round. ‘Oh yes, I remember those South American feathers; they used to frighten me when I was a little girl. I wonder Lydia has kept them all these years. Dear, dear! do you think she will be long, Aunt Hannah?’

‘I hope not, dear, for both our sakes. I am uncommonly hungry, and would like to have my lunch before we start back to The Grange.’

Just then there was a noise heard outside, and a few minutes later Mrs Kendal, looking thinner and more hungry-eyed than ever, entered, accompanied by a little boy, who was extremely like her, with keen black eyes and a peevish mouth. Mrs Kendal entered quickly and in some perturbation. When she saw Miss Jeffries she dropped an involuntary curtsy, but when she saw Shirley she uttered a little shriek of surprise.

‘Oh Shirley!’ she said. ‘Oh Shirley! is that really yourself? Oh, you are not a bit altered—not a bit!’

Shirley was not going to give herself away. She replied quietly to Lydia Kendal’s remarks, and then glanced at Aunt Hannah.

‘I have come,’ said Aunt Hannah slowly—‘Sit down, please, Mrs Kendal. Perhaps you had better take your little boy out of the room.’

‘He won’t leave me, and he’ll do no harm.—You stand still, Georgy-Porgy. Don’t put your finger into your mouth. Make your bow to the ladies, and behave yourself.’

'Georgy-Porgy' made a very old-fashioned bow, putting his hand to his forehead and then stretching it straight out before him. After this small ceremony he dropped on to a stool by his mother's side and fixed his black eyes on Shirley's face. He did not remember her in the least, but she attracted him.

'May I ask, ma'am,' said Mrs Kendal, who had partly recovered herself, 'why you have visited me to-day?'

'I will tell you, and in a few words,' said Miss Jeffries. 'My name is Hannah Jeffries. I live on my own farm not very far from The Grange. I am sister of Mrs Cairns of The Grange, and I consider myself an aunt to this young lady, whom, I understand, you knew when she was a child.'

'I knew Shirley well, and loved her well too,' said Mrs Kendal, who was rapidly making up her mind how she could avail herself of this visit and at the same time keep friendly with Julia. This was not the time to blackmail Shirley; she must conciliate her at any cost.

'My niece, as I call Miss Kendal, consulted me yesterday about you,' said Miss Jeffries. 'She told me a considerable part of her own history when she lived in your house. She was but a little child at the time. She stayed with you, I understand, for several years, first in Rio and then in Mexico. It was in Mexico her father died.'

'Ah, Shirley, shall I ever forget that sorrowful day?' said Mrs Kendal.

'We needn't talk of it now, if you don't mind,' said Miss Jeffries. 'What I want to say is this—

that after Mr Kendal's death you tried your best to retain Shirley with you.'

'Simply because I loved her—for no other reason,' replied Mrs Kendal.

'It will be best to be truthful, Mrs Kendal,' said Miss Jeffries in a severe voice. 'You were a poor woman, by your own showing, and Shirley was rich—very rich. She was quite a child. You could not have had her living with you without feathering your own nest. You intended to feather it, did you not?'

'I intended her to pay me, madam, but only in reason. It was scarcely to be expected that I should keep Shirley for nothing.—Take your thumb out of your mouth, Georgy-Porgy, and don't stare so.'

Mrs Kendal gave Georgy a sharp rap on the knuckles. He began to whimper, and presently buried his head in his mother's skirt.

'You needn't be so sharp with your little boy,' said Miss Jeffries in an indignant tone. 'But to continue: Shirley, having got explicit directions from her father, could not comply with your request. You and she then entered into an agreement.'

Mrs Kendal shuffled uneasily.

'We did,' she said after a pause.

'For two years Shirley was to supply you out of her own portion—or whatever part of it she was allowed by her guardian to spend; she was to supply you with a pound a week. She did, did she not?'

'It was a beggarly pittance,' muttered Mrs Kendal, giving herself away for the moment.

'It was a very generous present, to which you had not the slightest claim,' said Miss Jeffries. 'But what I am coming to now is this. She entered into an agreement with you, and kept her word to the letter.'

'She could do no less.'

'But I did it, Lydia—I did it.'

'Yes, Shirley, you did; I'm not going to deny it.'

'She promised it for two years, and two years alone; is that not so?' continued Miss Jeffries.

'There was always the hope that the promise would be renewed,' said Mrs Kendal unwillingly.

'A hope in your own breast which you had not the slightest right to entertain,' said Miss Jeffries. 'Shirley refused to give you any further help, did she not?'

'I could scarcely believe any one would have been so cold-blooded, but she did; I'm pained to say she did,' said Mrs Kendal.

'Then, that being the case, why did you come to Hillingborough?'

'It seemed a good central town, where I could get employment as a needlewoman. I am a very poor woman. Shirley there, whom I nursed and loved and helped and mothered, is rich.'

'Be that the case or not,' said Miss Jeffries, 'Shirley and I have come here to-day to say that you are not to get any more money whatever from her. I will take up your case, examine carefully into your antecedents, and if I find you worthy of the assistance of Shirley Kendal, I will establish you in a little business. Now, don't get

excited. I will only do this if I find you worthy. If I see the slightest attempt on your part to blackmail Shirley I will never give you a farthing, and I will warn my friends against you.'

'You are very kind, I'm sure; and, try as you may, you cannot discover anything against me,' said Mrs Kendal, whimpering as she spoke.

'Don't cry, mummy,' suddenly exclaimed Georgy-Porgy.

He jumped to his feet and put his arms round his mother's neck. Shirley called him to her softly. She took something out of her pocket. She was the sort of girl who always had surprises ready for people, and what she gave Georgy-Porgy was a rosy apple from last year's growth. But it was a prize inestimable to that young gentleman. He smiled through his tears into her face. She smiled back again at him, and there was a compact of love established between the two on the spot.

'There is another point I am coming to,' said Miss Jeffries. 'What connection have you with my niece Julia Cairns?'

'None, ma'am—none at all. Your niece Miss Cairns?'

'Yes, my niece Miss Cairns. You were seen speaking to her yesterday.'

Mrs Kendal paused for a minute; then she said hurriedly:

'I was on my way to inquire for Shirley. I met the young lady, who told me I couldn't possibly see Miss Kendal, for she was not at home. I went back again all the weary way, and I endured the waste of money and the disappoint-

ment. It was not what Shirley could give me; it was just to kiss her I wanted.'

'You had no occasion to kiss her; and, to be frank with you, I don't believe you. Well, in future you are on no account to visit The Grange. I will begin my inquiries about you immediately. If you are worthy I will start you in some little business. I will stock a shop for you, or something else, and Shirley here will be delighted to help me. I should prefer your not staying in Hillingborough, as you are too near my adopted niece. But all these things can be arranged later. I am glad you have had no dealings with my niece. Were such a thing as that to be discovered, I should have nothing whatever to do with you.'

The interview lasted a little longer. It was not in any sense of the word satisfactory, but it was the best Miss Jeffries could do on the spur of the moment. When she left Mrs Kendal she had one or two false addresses in her pocket, which this worthy woman had given her, of friends and neighbours who, she said, knew her in Rio and in Mexico, and who would speak for her.

CHAPTER XXI.

MR CAIRNS SPEAKS HIS MIND.



ON the very day that Miss Jeffries had taken Shirley with her to Hillingborough, Mr and Mrs Cairns were walking gently up and down the garden. There is no doubt that they were a very old-fashioned pair. As they paced now arm-in-arm Mrs Cairns was heard to sigh gently.

‘What is it, my dear Charity?’ said her husband at once. ‘Is anything grieving you?’

‘Nothing exactly,’ she replied; ‘but on the whole, Stephen, are you thoroughly satisfied with household matters at the present time?’

‘What do you mean?’ he asked.

‘Why, for instance, there is Shirley’——

‘Well, and surely no one—*no one* has the heart to say a word against Shirley.’

‘I don’t think anybody has. Shirley is a dear child, and you and I are both deeply attached to her.’

‘We are; and so is every one else.’

‘No, Stephen; in this one particular you share the short-sightedness of the ordinary man. Our little Julia—our own dear child—does not like Shirley. Now, her dislike to your niece has begun seriously to puzzle me. I cannot account for it.

At first I put it down to ordinary jealousy, for our child is very affectionate, and it must have been very hard to see another take, as it were, her place in the household.'

'My dear Charity, who has taken Julia's place? You women ought really to be reasonable. If you complain of us men wanting sharpness of wit, you at least ought to be fair when you draw your deductions. Julia is Julia—our child, our heiress.'

'The money question doesn't come into the matter, Stephen.'

'What does come into it, dear? Pray explain yourself.'

'There is not the slightest doubt that Julia is unhappy. For the first time in her life a sense of mystery seems to surround her.'

Mr Cairns quickened his steps. He was very much annoyed.

'The fact is, she seems to be in money difficulties.'

'Julia in money difficulties, Charity!'

'It is a fact, Stephen. She came to me yesterday and implored of me to lend her a pound. She said, of course, she would pay it back out of her own pocket-money. When last I questioned her with regard to her allowance she had pounds and pounds laid by. These seem to have vanished, and yet she has certainly bought nothing new.'

'I give her what I consider a very liberal allowance,' said Mr Cairns after a pause. 'Ten shillings a week ought to be ample for any girl who leads the retired life she does.'

‘It is abundance. She ought on no account to have more. I buy all her clothes. When she is really grown up and has come out it will be a different matter. But, all the same, at the present moment she is sorely in want of money. What does she do with it?’

‘If I were you, Charity, as the girl’s mother I would ask her.’

‘But she may refuse to tell me.’

‘Refuse to tell her mother! A nice state of things for a young creature only fifteen years of age to have come to!’

‘I don’t know what to do,’ said Mrs Cairns, knitting her brows, and an anxious, almost tearful inflection coming into her voice. ‘Fond as I am of Shirley, I would rather she went than make our dearest child unhappy.’

‘Then, Charity, if you send Shirley away simply because Julia dislikes her, I for my part will never forgive you. You will do Julia’s character a serious injury. You will so foster that love of self which is undoubtedly a serious defect in our dear little girl that she will never be the same again. Then think of the injustice to the orphan girl—a child who has suffered as dear little Shirley has—a child so loving, so frank, so sweet.’

‘I could not do it, certainly,’ said Mrs Cairns, tears filling her eyes; ‘but you will own that the position is difficult.’

‘Well, if you won’t talk to Julia, I will. And there she is coming towards the lawn; there is no time like the present.’

‘Oh Stephen! you will be gentle with her.’

'Gentle—to my own child! My dear wife, was I ever anything else?—Hi! Ju! Come along here, monkey, this minute. Here are father and mother waiting to talk to you.'

'No; do it yourself,' said Mrs Cairns; 'I couldn't. She does look quite unhappy.'

Mrs Cairns hurried into the house. Julia crossed the lawn, passed under an arch, and found herself in the special garden where her father and mother had been walking. As she approached it Mr Cairns had to acknowledge that his wife was right. Little Julia looked perhaps less prim than formerly, but her face was pale, there were dark hollows under her eyes, and her whole attitude was that of one too intensely anxious and nervously absorbed for the perfect equilibrium of health. Mr Cairns was something of a doctor; he was also something of a physiologist. He looked at Julia with dissatisfaction.

'I liked her better before Shirley came here. And yet, Shirley—it is impossible that Shirley can be to blame. At the same time, it is an undoubted fact that Julia is not so nice a girl—not so lady-like, not so refined-looking—as she was before her cousin's advent. Oh, poor little Lily! she can have nothing to do with this. And yet, Shirley—oh no, I cannot blame that dear child.'

Meanwhile Julia approached, looked up at her father, and said gently:

'Do you want me, father?'

'I want to have a chat with you, my little Ju. It seems a long, long time since you and I had

a talk all by ourselves. In the old days we often did, didn't we?'

'Oh yes, father; the old days are gone, never to return.'

'Why do you speak in such a mournful tone, my child?'

'I—oh, father dear! I miss them.'

'In some ways so do I, Julia. But whose fault is it that they have vanished? In one sense the old order might have continued; it need not have changed to the new.'

Julia looked full up at her father. He glanced down at her, and noticed how small and thin was her little face, and how over-large her anxious eyes were, and a feeling of great pity for the somewhat desolate-looking little girl, and a great love for her, filled his heart.

'Now, Julia,' he said, 'you and I must have a straight talk. Yes, my love'—for Julia moved away from him with a restless gesture—'we must, and at once. I have seen for some little time that you are not yourself. It is borne in upon me most forcibly to-day that you are unhappy. There is no reason why you should be unhappy.'

'Oh father, all girls—all people, I mean—have some trouble, haven't they?'

'Undoubtedly that is true as regards life,' replied her father. 'But you, my dear little girl, are only on the threshold of life, and you are carefully and gently guarded. You are kindly dealt with. You want for nothing that the heart of girl could possibly desire. All your needs are supplied—your bodily needs and your spiritual needs. Julia, my

child, there is a great deal of love expended on you; there is a great deal of hope centred round you. What is the matter, my love?’

‘It is just because—because’—— said Julia, and then all of a sudden she burst into tears. ‘I can’t help it,’ she said; ‘I am unhappy.’

‘But why, my dear child? Tell me.’

‘You won’t sympathise—you won’t understand. What is the good? What is the good?’ she said.

‘There is every good, little Julia—every possible good. I want you to confide fully in me. Why are you unhappy?’

‘Father—it is because of Shirley. It is because you love her so much; you know you do.’

‘I do love her, Julia. She is my own niece. The mere fact that she is my own dead sister’s only child would alone make me love her. But in addition she is lovable in herself; she has great charm’——

‘Oh, don’t, father! I am sick of hearing of her virtues.’

‘I will not talk of them if it pains you, but at the same time I mean to have a very straight conversation with you. Do you really know—or must I put it to you—what is the matter?’

Julia was silent. She looked very uncomfortable.

‘Julia,’ continued her father, ‘I have noticed ever since Shirley came here that you are changed. From the very first you did not take to her kindly. You were not prepared for the fact that in your home any one could be loved in the slightest degree as you are loved. You did not welcome Shirley as you ought to have welcomed her. And

now you are unhappy. You are unhappy, and you are not acting rightly. It is not only because your cousin is in the house that you wear that miserable face. You have given way to envy and jealousy. Those sins, if really allowed to take possession of the heart, blacken and change the whole nature. Your nature is affected and its goodness detracted from by those sins which you day after day allow to strengthen within you. I don't know for what reason you borrowed a pound from your mother, but you do know, my dear child, that I have always expected you to keep within your allowance. Why did you borrow it, Julia?'

'That is my secret, father.'

'I will not press it, but has it anything to do with Shirley?'

Julia dug her nails into the palm of her hand.

'I would rather not say,' was her reply.

'I will not press you, but your whole attitude makes me unhappy. You are not giving me your true confidence. You are miserable because Shirley is in the house; but when a thing has to be endured it is best to endure it cheerfully. Now listen to me. Whether you like your cousin or whether you do not like her, she is going to stay. As long as she acts as a sensible and kindly and amiable girl should, she will be treated with love and affection. I would not on any consideration have a girl brought up with you whom I did not honour and respect.'

'Father!' said Julia quickly.

'What is the matter, Julia? Why do you interrupt me?'

'Say those words again, father; please—please, father.'

'What words, my child? How you startle me!'

'You said—you did say that you wouldn't on any consideration have a girl brought up with me whom you did not honour and respect.'

'I undoubtedly said so, Julia; and I meant it, my child.'

'Then, father'——

'What is it, Julia? How strange you look!'

'If I—if I can prove to you that Shirley is not worthy of your love and your respect, will you then'——

'Will I what, Julia?'

'If I can prove that she is not worthy, will you still keep her here to make me most truly miserable?'

'You cannot possibly prove it. You would do wrong even to try.'

'But if I can—if I can? Please, father, speak.'

'If you can,' said Mr Cairns very slowly—'if you indeed can—— But you can't.'

'Father, father—if I can?'

'Such a thing is impossible, my dear. Why talk nonsense?'

'Nevertheless, dear father, speak.'

'Well, Julia, if it has got to your knowledge that your cousin could or would do anything really mean and low—— My dear, you humble me; I don't wish to go on.'

'Father, if I could prove to you that Shirley is not worthy of your love nor of your respect, would you torture me by keeping her here?'

‘In such a case she would have to go. But I trust—I believe—that no such ordeal lies before us.’

‘You have said enough, father.’

‘Julia, I don’t understand you.’

‘You will presently—presently. This relieves me; I see daylight at last, and hope.’

‘Julia, you are talking nonsense. Your cousin’s past is honourable—as honourable as her conduct is now. In any case, what can you know of her past which has been concealed from me? The dear child has had troubles which, thank God! you have been spared. Let us say no more of this matter.’

‘Nevertheless, I hold you to your promise.’

‘I will not listen to you, Julia. I begin to think that you are not accountable for your conduct at the present moment. I am seriously displeased with you; and you have not yet even explained why you borrowed the pound from your mother.’

‘I will tell you, father,’ said Julia, her eyes flashing. ‘It has to do with Shirley and her past. There, there! I will explain to you before long.’

CHAPTER XXII.

WAS THERE A LETTER?



ABOUT a week after the events related in the last chapter Mrs Cairns was going to Hillingborough to buy certain things, and also to pay a visit to an old friend. She happened to mention the circumstance at breakfast, and as she did so her eyes met Julia's. Julia gave her a very longing and hungry glance.

'Would you like to come with me, Julia?—Perhaps you three girls would like to come?' she added, glancing at Shirley and Lily.

'But when are you going, Mrs Cairns?' asked Miss Munro. 'I don't wish to interfere,' she continued, 'in any real pleasure which happens to come in the children's way, but we are all working a little extra hard at present.'

'I need not take any of them, of course,' said Mrs Cairns, 'if you disapprove, Miss Munro. But I have ordered the carriage to be here by eleven o'clock. I shall drive to the station in time to catch the half-past eleven train.'

'Oh mother! I should like to go,' said Julia.

'May she come?' asked Mrs Cairns, glancing at the governess.

'Please say yes,' continued Julia in her most

coaxing tone. 'It is such a long, long time since I was out alone with mammy.'

'I suppose I must yield,' said Miss Munro; 'but still'——

'Of course you will yield,' now interrupted Shirley. Julia felt herself frowning; she did not want Shirley to be the one to get her this favour. 'Of course you must yield. Poor Julia would like a day with her mother. And you know, Miss Munro, she is much farther on in the history questions than either Lily or I.'

'So you will come, then, Julia,' said Mrs Cairns, rising quickly from the table as she spoke; and a few minutes later the girls found themselves in the schoolroom.

Lily went up to Julia.

'You ought to thank Shirley; it was really she who got you this great treat,' she said.

'Nonsense, Lily!' said Shirley. 'Julia needn't thank me. I don't want any one to thank me who doesn't feel grateful.'

Julia made an effort to speak.

'I suppose you are very good-natured,' she said. 'Thank you, then, if you wish it.'

She was really trembling with delight. Such an unexpected opportunity seemed to her like a godsend. She had been wondering ever since her talk with her father how she could obtain another interview with Mrs Kendal. She dared not write to the woman, for letters were always in danger of being overlooked. Even if she could have written she would not have ventured to ask her to call at The Grange; and as to going herself

to see her, that was equally impossible. Without one more interview, at least, with Mrs Kendal she could not effect her object, which was to get Shirley out of the house at any cost. Now things seemed suddenly to have straightened themselves out. She ran away to dress, feeling all at once in good spirits.

Heron remarked on her young lady's improved appearance.

'You do look spry, missy,' she said. 'I am pleased as never was to see it.'

'I am so glad to go out with mother! I see so little of her now that there are other girls in the house,' said Julia.

'Well, missy, that's but natural. Here, let me get out your prettiest hat and pelisse. This art-blue that has just come home will suit you exactly, miss.'

The art-blue coat, which was made very long, almost to the hem of Julia's frock, was extremely becoming. It had soft coffee lace round the neck and sleeves, and a large hat trimmed to match gave the little girl a very striking and even *chic* appearance.

Presently she ran downstairs, to find her mother waiting for her in the hall. But Julia had not reckoned upon one thing. Standing close to her mother, brushing his hat preparatory to putting it on, was Mr Cairns.

'Oh father!' she cried, 'I didn't know you were coming too.'

'Nor did I, Julie, until I heard you make your little wail this morning on behalf of the ex-

pedition. You were keen to go, and it suddenly occurred to me that I would be keen to go too.'

'Yes, father, of course—of course.'

But Julia's heart had sunk low in her boots. With her mother shopping she might easily snatch half-an-hour in which to visit Mrs Kendal, but in her father's company this would be quite impossible.

'Stay, Julia, one minute,' said Mr Cairns. 'We have a very short time at our disposal before the carriage arrives. It rather depends on whether Mr Vaughan comes to see me or not. He was to call at twelve o'clock. If he could not come he was to send a note. Will you run round to the stables, dear, and ask if any message has come from Mr Vaughan of Steele Lodge? Be quick, dear.—I had quite forgotten Vaughan,' continued Mr Cairns, addressing his wife. 'It is well I thought of it. If he has written he won't come, and then I shall be able to accompany you and Julia. I think we might buy a few little presents for all the children'——

'Nice books would be what they value most,' said Mrs Cairns. 'It will be pleasant to give them to Shirley and Lily this evening; they both appreciate attentions so much.'

'Shirley,' said Mr Cairns, 'for so rich a girl, adores small gifts. I call it a very delightful trait in her character. She is not a bit *blasé*. She is as fresh in her desires as though she had never left one county of her native land.'

'She is as fresh and simple as dear little Lily herself,' said Mrs Cairns. 'Ah! here comes Julia.'

‘Well, Julia,’ said her father, ‘any letter? I hope so, for I am really getting quite anxious to start on our little expedition.’

‘No, father,’ replied Julia. ‘I asked two of the stable-men. There isn’t any letter.’

Julia’s face was very white, and some of the joyous look had gone out of her eyes.

‘Oh Stephen,’ said his wife, ‘you may be sure he won’t come. Do risk it, my love. You can leave a note for him. Say you were called to Hillingborough on business.’

‘But not important business, dear,’ said Mr Cairns, and he slowly removed his overcoat. ‘No, Charity, I cannot go with you. I must keep my word to Vaughan. A pity—a great pity—but of course he will come; you will probably meet him in the avenue. I wish I could follow you, but it would not be worth while. Here comes the carriage. Step in.—Julia, follow your mother.—Have a pleasant visit, both of you. Enjoy yourselves, my dears.’

The carriage drove off. Julia was trembling all over. When she had reached the stables she had seen a letter addressed to her father in Mr Vaughan’s well-known hand. He was an elderly man, a neighbouring magistrate, and a special friend of Mr Cairns’s. Julia had looked wildly round her. If only she could keep her father from going to Hillingborough! She was absolutely certain that if he received the letter he would go, for Mr Vaughan was not a man to write an unnecessary line. Did anybody see her? No, there was not a soul in sight. She snatched up the

letter, thrust it into her pocket, and came back into the hall.

Thus she had secured her immediate wish. Mr Cairns remained in to meet the friend who was not coming, and Julia and her mother drove away together.

‘Well, dear,’ said the mother, drawing her little girl close to her side, ‘we will have a pleasant day, won’t we?’

‘Oh yes, mother—very.’

Julia gave herself an inward shake. She must not show her mother that she felt depressed and miserable. She must struggle for outward calm, whatever happened. Already the dreadful letter she concealed seemed to be burning a hole in her pocket. She hated herself more than words could say.

They reached the little station without anything special occurring, and by-and-by they found themselves in Hillingborough. Mrs Cairns took a long list out of her pocket.

‘All these things have to be got,’ she said. ‘What shall I do with you?’

‘You can leave me in the carriage if you like, mother.’

‘But wouldn’t you like to come in with me?’

‘Couldn’t I do some of the list, mother?’

Julia bent over to see what her mother had to do.

‘Well, I tell you what we will do, Julia. You would find it very dull in the cab. I will take you straight to the bookseller’s, and you can select a book for yourself, and one for Lily, and one

for Shirley. You can then wait for me. It will be less dull at the book-shop than anywhere else.'

'Oh yes, mother; indeed—indeed it won't be dull at all. But how long do you think you will be?'

'It is just twelve now; I will call for you not later than one o'clock. Can you manage a whole hour by yourself?'

'Of course I can, mother.'

Mrs Cairns put her head out of the fly window.

'Stop at Jones's in the High Street,' she said to the man; and soon afterwards they drew up before a very pretty shop filled with volumes and pictures and photographs, and other interesting-looking articles of all sorts and descriptions. Julia nodded to her mother and went straight in. She intended to spend a very short time in selecting the books. She did not mean to get any book for herself. Bad as she was, or bad as she was becoming, she was not bad enough for that.

'I don't want it; I should hate it,' she thought; and then, just because she meant seriously to injure Shirley, she took special pains in choosing a volume which she knew would please the young girl. As for Lily, she chose her book with more haste.

'Please put these by for the present,' she said; 'I shall be back in a very few minutes.'

She left the shop. In her very pretty dress she was sufficiently attractive-looking to cause people to turn round and glance at her. She wished now she had come to Hillingborough in

her old brown coat and skirt; then no one would have troubled to glance at her twice. She thought she knew her way quite well to Cumnor Street, but the fact was, she had not been there from Jones's in the High Street before, and in order to get there, and in order also to lose no time on the way, she was obliged to ask several people to direct her. She took a good ten to twelve minutes of her precious time in reaching the little back street where Mrs Kendal resided. By-and-by she was sounding a modest rat-tat on the little knocker, and a moment or two later she found herself in the small and shabby parlour.

CHAPTER XXIII.

'WHY DO YOU HATE ME?'



OW, Lydia Kendal had had several qualms of conscience since that memorable visit of Shirley herself and Miss Jeffries. She had not cared twopence about Miss Jeffries. She only regarded her as a shrewd, rather troublesome old lady. But Shirley! In the old days she had loved Shirley. This woman had not given much love to any one in the course of her life. Poor, plain little Georgy-Porgy had often to complain of his mother's coldness and indifference. But Shirley, as a beautiful child, as a girl full of spirit and life and enthusiasm, had roused that somewhat callous heart; she had drawn the best out of it in the past. When Mrs Kendal saw the young girl again she felt, as she expressed it, that she had a conscience.

'My word!' she muttered afterwards to herself, 'I thought that it was dead, withered up and gone; but it isn't, and Shirley set it quivering.'

It was not only her desire to stand well, therefore, with Miss Jeffries that made her very cold to Julia when that young lady came to see her; it was also the thought of Shirley herself. She regretted deeply now that she had told Julia that story about Shirley's past life.

'Poor little Shirley!' she said to herself; 'when I think of the things I have done! And her father was nearly starving, and she herself nearly starving. Oh dear! oh dear! I wish I hadn't told on her. I don't like that young lady, and she can't help me half as much as Miss Jeffries can. It's my business as well as my duty to keep friends with Miss Jeffries. I must snub this young lady, and pretty soon.'

These were her feelings as Julia, trembling and excited, waited for her. When she did go in, the dainty appearance which Julia presented in her pretty spring costume mollified Mrs Kendal for a moment. She felt a sudden desire to keep both strings to her bow—Julia and Miss Jeffries. Nay, even three strings might be desirable. Why not Julia, Miss Jeffries, and Shirley?

But as this would be impossible, she quickly resolved to throw Julia over.

'Well, miss,' she said—'how are you, miss? Won't you sit down?'

'I can't stay,' said Julia; 'I am in a hurry. I just called for a minute to say'——

'Yes, miss?—Georgy-Porgy, do take your finger out of your mouth.'

It was one of this small boy's unpleasant habits to follow his mother and stare in a sort of vacant manner at her visitors. He went up to Julia now and laid his wet finger on her pretty new frock. She pulled it away with a strong, fierce gesture.

'You needn't be so rude to my little boy, Miss Cairns.—Georgy-Porgy, don't cry. Go out of the room.'

Georgy strangled a sob in his throat, but he refused to budge.

'You can speak out quite plainly before the child, miss. He never repeats, and he is a very good boy. If you won't sit down, what is your business, please?'

'I thought I'd come and see you. I haven't any money to give you to-day or I would. I am sorry for you. You remember that story you told me?'

'What story, miss?'

'You must remember it—about Shirley.'

'There are so many stories about my dear young cousin Shirley Kendal! To which do you allude, Miss Cairns?'

Julia knew then that the woman was not going to say anything further to her; nevertheless, she felt impelled to go on.

'What a strange person you are!' she said. 'You know perfectly well what you said last time we met, and how you said it. I want you to say it again. I can—it's a dreadful thing to say, but I can make it worth your while.'

'How much worth my while?' said Mrs Kendal, giving a keen glance at Georgy, who was thin and his clothes shabby. The little house was shabby too, and Mrs Kendal herself needed boots and clothes and the hundred and one *et ceteras* that mean money. 'How much?' she asked, fixing her greedy eyes on Julia.

'Oh, I don't know,' said the young girl; 'only I think father—I mean that I'd ask him.'

Mrs Kendal gave a sort of sniff of contempt.

'Now you look here, Miss Cairns,' she said. 'What I said then I repent of. I said it when I was in a pique. I didn't mean to injure my dear young cousin. I am very fond of her: every one is who knows Shirley. I am not fond of you, miss; you are nothing to me. You hain't got her ways—not a bit of it. Compared to her, too, it strikes me you are poor. Anyhow, poor or rich, you are nothing to me, and I rather think I'm nothing to you. What I said the other day I repent of.'

'But you did say it, all the same,' continued Julia, her eyes flashing with rage and disappointment.

'I did say it, miss, but I left out some things. I could give it a different complexion; you understand, miss.'

'Still, it is true,' said Julia—'it is true.'

'Well, miss, I don't tell lies.'

'It is true that she did steal a watch—she, my cousin.'

'Circumstances, miss, make the fact not so very bad.'

'You have the necessary proof? If I wanted you to say that Shirley had stolen a watch, you could prove it?'

'I am not saying it, miss.'

'But you did tell me.'

'I'm not saying what I told you, miss. I'd rather you went away. I don't want to injure my dear young lady—yes, she is my dear young lady; I love her.'

'So do I love Shirley,' cried Georgy-Porgy at that

moment. 'Go away, horrid girl!' he continued. 'I don't like you nor your ugly dress.'

Julia walked to the window and looked out. Then she turned back and faced Mrs Kendal.

'I don't know why you have changed so,' she said. 'You will never get any more money from me again.'

'I dare say I could, miss, for that matter, if I liked. If I could prove that you come here unknown to anybody, why, I could get what money I liked from you. I could blackmail you, miss, to any extent from this time forward. And now you'd best go away, for if you don't I'll write to Miss Jeffries.'

'To—to Aunt Hannah?'

'I don't know what you call the lady; she is Miss Jeffries to me. She has been here, and she has given me a right good talking to. I won't be hard on you, but if necessary I could make you pay for this. You had best go now.'

Julia did go; she was too frightened to stay. Her head was aching; her eyes swam with tears of mortification. She wished herself back at home; she wished she had never touched this evil thing. What did it all mean? Shirley—Shirley—her cousin—the girl whom everybody loved! Oh, why had she been told that story by this awful woman, who now practically went back on her word? Why had she spoken as she had done to her father? Never before was girl more humiliated or more miserable.

She just managed to be back at the bookseller's shop before her mother returned. Mrs Cairns had

not only done her shopping, but she had visited her friend, and her friend had asked her to bring Julia in the afternoon to have tea with her; and Mrs Cairns was very proud of her little daughter, and anxious to show her off to the best advantage.

'I hope, my darling, you did not find it very tiring,' she said. 'What books have you selected? Ah, these! Very nice indeed. I am sure Shirley will like your choice.'

'It is a beautiful copy of *In Memoriam*,' said Julia, 'and Shirley loves *In Memoriam*.'

'Very well, then; I will pay for them.'

Mrs Cairns did so. The bookseller was desired to send the little parcel to the railway station in time for the train, and the mother and daughter went to a neighbouring restaurant for lunch.

Mrs Cairns was hungry, but Julia had to force herself to eat. In slipping her hand into her pocket, it came in contact with the letter she had stolen from the stables. Oh dear! It seemed to the unhappy child that she was getting into more and more difficulties each moment. Mrs Cairns, however, noticed nothing; she chatted on cheerfully. Julia was thankful that her face did not betray her misery.

Soon after lunch they went to see the pretty little old lady, a certain Mrs Everett, whom Julia's mother had often spoken of to her. Mrs Everett looked at Julia and kissed her affectionately.

'I knew your dear mother when she was even younger than you are,' she said. 'I am glad to meet her child. Give me a kiss of your own accord, little girl, and then sit by the window and

play with my kittens. There are five of them in that basket, and I don't think you will often see anything prettier.'

'I am sorry I did not bring my husband's niece, Shirley Kendal, with me to see the kittens,' said Mrs Cairns. 'She would go wild about them. I don't think my darling Julia is so devoted to pets as Shirley is.'

Julia bent her flushed face over the basket of kittens. She was glad to pretend to occupy herself with them. She was glad to have a minute or two to herself; to have Mrs Everett and her mother chatting contentedly to each other. They were in no trouble. They had come, both of them, to a period of life when all is calm—when the storms of passion and angry emotions have ceased. But Julia was in the brunt of the storm—a terrible tempest which she had gathered round herself by her own jealousy and evil feelings. She would have given a great deal then to have been able to make a frank confession. But no, no! To humiliate herself before Shirley would indeed be the final straw. She could not—she would not—allow herself to be betrayed.

'Shirley might stay if only I could feel safe,' was her thought of thoughts. 'It is not Shirley now who so dreadfully matters; it is I myself. I to be disgraced before my own father! I to have to declare what I have done! Oh dear, what is to become of me? And that letter! I must have been mad this morning. Oh, what am I to do with it? Oh! I wish—I wish I could throw it away before I get home. Couldn't I

fling it out of the window when I am going in the train? But then mother would see. It is much too cold to have the window open, and mother would notice me. And I should have to tear it up into little bits, and she would notice that. I dare not take it back to the house; I feel somehow as if father would see it in my pocket. Or if he didn't, Shirley would. Shirley has eyes like a lynx; she sees everything. What shall I do?’

Just then Mrs Everett's voice was heard addressing Julia.

‘Wouldn't you like to go out into the garden to see the flowers and amuse yourself with them?’ she said. ‘You might pick some of those lovely yellow wallflowers to give to your mother.—My wallflowers are celebrated, dear,’ she continued, addressing Mrs Cairns, ‘and I am sure you would like a great big bunch to take away with you.—Yes, my dear, go and walk in the sunshine; you are looking quite pale.’

Mrs Cairns glanced at her little daughter in some apprehension.

‘Are you tired, Julie?’ she said.

‘A little bit, mother,’ answered the child.

Mrs Everett crossed the room.

‘There's nothing like fresh air for young people,’ she said.

She opened the door of her conservatory as she spoke.

‘Just run down those steps, dear. Walk to the end of the conservatory and you will find a further door. Open it and you will get into the garden.’

When Julia had departed Mrs Cairns turned to Mrs Everett.

'I do hope Julia isn't working too hard,' she said. 'In these days such a lot is expected of young people.'

'She does look a little pale,' said Mrs Everett; 'but if I were you, my dear, I would not take any notice of it. It is the worst thing in the world to encourage children to fancy themselves ill. Many a little illness is averted and goes off if no notice is taken of it. Your Julia is a nice-looking child, though not particularly happy.'

'Not particularly happy!' said Mrs Cairns, in some amazement. 'Do you really notice that?'

'The expression on her face shows that she is not perfectly at peace with herself. But take no notice, dear; take no notice.'

Mrs Cairns thought of Shirley—of the borrowed sovereign—of her husband's remarks. But, after all, she was a very placid kind of woman, and did not trouble herself over-much unless matters were serious. She resolved, however, to consult the local doctor, who would doubtless order Julia a tonic.

Meanwhile Julia, in the garden, was breathing more freely. Presently she passed the gardener, who was digging deep into the soft earth. He was making a trench into which he was going to put certain vegetables. It suddenly occurred to Julia that this would be the very place to bury her letter. She could not do so with the gardener looking on, but the garden was large; she might come to a less-frequented spot. She walked down the centre path, and presently she came to a great



Then, tearing the letter across, she thrust it into the hole.

mound filled with all sorts of odds and ends of plants and flowers. The earth here was quite soft, and, as though left there on purpose, a little trowel lay on the ground near by. Julia stooped and dug a hole about a foot deep; then, tearing the letter across, she thrust it into the hole. She covered it up with earth, and stood panting for a minute. One of the gardeners passed. He looked at her, saw that her face was red, and noticed that there was some earth on her pretty blue pelisse.

'Let me wipe it off for you, missy,' he said.

'Wipe what off?' asked Julia.

He pointed to her dress. She saw that she had stained it slightly. She took out her handkerchief to rub the mark, and rubbed away the most of it; but there was an undoubted brown stain, which Heron would notice on the spotless new pelisse. But never mind; the stain was nothing compared to the letter, and the letter was safe. It could never rise up to witness against her.

Julia felt much more cheerful on her way home. She had certainly lifted the burden from her mind when she buried the letter. In her own home garden there might have been the possibility of one of the dogs scratching it up again, but in Mrs Everett's garden it must be safe. As far as Julia knew, Mrs Everett only owned cats. Cats would not unbury hidden treasure.

'Well, darling,' said her mother as they stepped into the carriage on their way home, 'I am glad you enjoyed yourself. We had a very pleasant day on the whole.'

'Yes, mother, very pleasant.'

'We missed your dear father. It would have been nice if he had accompanied us.'

'Yes, mother, very nice.'

'But I have had my dear little daughter to myself, and I did enjoy her sweet society.'

'Oh, thank you, mummy, so much!'

'I could often take you away with me for a day, or even a day or two, Julia. It would be good for you. Now that Shirley has Lily to be her companion, she would not miss you.'

'Shirley would never miss me,' said Julia.

'I don't know about that. I think she is very fond of you.'

Julia laughed. 'No, mother darling,' she said, 'Shirley does not care for me.'

Mrs Cairns was silent, but she took Julia's hand and squeezed it.

'Some day,' she said, 'I will talk to you about all these things, but not now. I know, however, that you are going through a time of strain. You must ask God to help you, my darling.'

Julia gave an inward shiver. She did not say a word.

'How is the examination going on? Have you any chance, do you think, of winning the prize?'

'A fair chance, mother; about as good a chance as either of the other girls.'

'You would like to win it?'

'Mother,' said Julia, turning and facing her mother and speaking with energy, 'may I just once—just once—tell you the very, very truth?'

'Oh Julia, my love! Do you ever tell me anything but the truth?'

‘I can’t answer that question. I am not what I was. Anyhow, listen; please listen.’

‘I am listening.’

‘I want to win the prize in order to prevent Shirley from getting it; otherwise I have not the smallest enthusiasm about it.’

‘All this is very wrong, Julia.’

‘Most things are wrong now, mother. Oh! don’t question me any more; and please don’t tell father. I suppose some day things will be better.’

Mrs Cairns felt too shocked to speak. What was to be done? Who would have supposed that her gentle, good-humoured little daughter could in a few months have developed into such a gloomy, jealous, unhappy girl?

When the carriage drew up at the porch, Shirley, Lily, and Mr Cairns were waiting to receive the travellers.

‘Had you a nice day, my love?’ said Mr Cairns as he helped his wife out of the carriage.

‘Very nice, Stephen,’ she said. ‘We went to tea with dear old Mrs Everett. It was so nice to see her again! I have invited her to stay for a day or two next week. She is coming on Monday.’

Julia did not know why this news suddenly gave her a sense of discomfort.

‘Hannah is coming too, so we shall be quite a jolly party,’ continued Mrs Cairns.

‘Very pleasant, my dear,’ said her husband.

‘We missed you, darling,’ said Mrs Cairns, glancing at him affectionately and laying her hand on his arm.

Mr Cairns flashed a sudden glance at Julia.

'By the way, Julia, did you look carefully for that note which Vaughan was to send to me?'

'Certainly I did, father.'

Making a marvellous effort, Julia had recovered her calm. She knew that everything depended on how she conducted herself for the next few minutes. Exposure, shame, untold misery might be her portion if she gave the faintest clue to what had really occurred.

'I looked for the note, father,' she said, fixing her eyes boldly on her father's face.

'And you did not see it?'

'Certainly I did not see it, father. Had I seen it I would have brought it to you.'

'Yes, that is what I thought,' said Mr Cairns, looking in a bewildered way at his wife. 'But, my dear, one of the grooms says that Vaughan did send a note. He said that he laid it himself on the ledge in the stable, and meant to bring it in immediately, but when he came back the note had vanished. I might have gone with you, Charity, for Vaughan could not manage to come over this morning—at least, I presume such were the contents of his note. At any rate, he did not come.'

There was dead silence, and all eyes were turned on Julia. There was certainly no apparent motive for her keeping back the note; nevertheless, every one looked at her, and Shirley's heart at least beat a trifle more quickly. Suddenly she went up to Julia and laid her hand on her cousin's arm.

'Let us go to the stables now and look for the note,' she said. 'It may have dropped down. Such accidents often happen.'

'There was no note there when I went to the stables,' said Julia, repeating her lie boldly, for she knew that if it failed her all was lost. 'I looked everywhere, but I am willing to go again. Perhaps Phillips put it into his pocket and forgot all about it. Servants are always so careless.'

'Come along to the stables and let us look,' said Shirley.

She linked her hand through Julia's arm. Her action was quite affectionate. The three girls went off together.

'It is odd about that note,' said Mr Cairns.

'It must have dropped down or got lost in some way,' said Mrs Cairns.

She was not greatly concerned about the missing note. She certainly did not in the very least connect Julia with it.

Meanwhile the three girls ran round to the stables. They made an extensive search. Phillips was called in and questioned.

'Yes, miss,' he said to Shirley, 'I had the note in my pocket just for a minute, and when I come to the stables Bobby began to whinny and kick. I took the note and laid it on the shelf just there, miss, and when I came again to look for it it were nowhere to be seen. Somebody must have took it.'

'Why should anybody take it?' said Julia.

'I don't know, miss.'

'Besides,' continued the young girl, talking rapidly, and a scarlet flush coming into her cheeks, 'I came to see if there was a note. Father sent me before mother and I went to Hillingborough. There was no note. I looked all over the stables.'

'Did you happen to cast your eye on this special shelf, Miss Julia—just a little bit over your head, so to speak?'

'Yes, yes,' said Julia; 'I raised myself on tiptoe to look. There was nothing there.'

'Well, of all the wonders!' said Phillips.

He pushed his hand through his thick hair perplexedly, and the girls returned to the house.

'Had you a pleasant day in town, Julia?' said Lily.

'Yes, Lily, pretty fair.'

'Are you coming to the schoolroom now? Miss Munro thinks we ought to look over our history once again before dinner.'

'Oh no, I can't think of it. I have a headache; travelling in the train generally gives me one.'

Julia went slowly away. Lily followed her at a respectful distance. Shirley remained in the hall. On Shirley's face there was an expression which took some of the brightness out of it. Presently she crossed the hall and went out. She went back to the stables and made a most thorough search, but nowhere could she get a trace of the missing note.

'I don't accuse her,' thought the young girl; 'I could not—I would not—be so mean; but I wish—oh, I wish I could get the expression in her eyes out of my head! Oh, poor, poor Julia! I wish I could do something for her.'

Julia was lying down in her own room when there came a gentle tap at her door. She said, 'Who is there?' In reply, the handle was softly turned, and Shirley came in.

'What do you want, Shirley? What is the matter?'

'I came to speak to you, Julia.'

'If it isn't anything very pressing, don't speak now. My head is worse; I may not be able to go downstairs this evening.'

'What I have to say need not make your head any worse; it is just possible that it may cure it,' said Shirley.

'I thought you were going to Miss Munro to do your history.'

'I know the part of history she wanted us to look over; I need not go to her.'

'Is Lily with her?'

'Yes.'

'Please go away, Shirley; you don't know how it irritates me to have you standing between me and the light.'

For answer Shirley went straight up to the bed. She took one of Julia's unwilling hands, and held it tightly between both her own.

'Why do you hate me?' she said, and there was a world of pathos in her voice.

In spite of herself—in spite of her strange dislike of this girl—Julia could not help being touched by it. Shirley's was the sort of voice which had the peculiar quality of tears in it. It was a voice which could arouse attention and stir emotion. Julia tried to pull her hand out of Shirley's grasp, but Shirley held it firm.

'Why do you hate me? Have I ever done you an injury?'

'You have injured me by coming here.'

Shirley stood quite still for a moment. There came a wild light into her eyes.

'I tell you what,' she said; 'I will do it.'

'What will you do, Shirley?'

'I must stay for a year. The year will be up in July; I will go then. I can go if I like. I will go.'

'Shirley, do you mean it?'

Julia sat up. Her eyes were almost as wild as Shirley's. She looked full into her face.

'For your sake,' said Shirley very slowly.

'Do you mean it?' repeated Julia, and she panted slightly.

'Because,' continued Shirley, 'I am doing you an injury so grave, so terrible, that it is not right for me to remain. I am making you wicked. You need not be wicked any longer. Those dreadful feelings that are always in your heart may be stilled. I will give up everything else for the sake of saving you. I will go.'

'But, Shirley, father won't permit it. Shirley, I know it is noble of you. I wish—I do wish I could say "Stay;" but I can't say it, for it is a fact that you try me beyond words, just because you are what you are. I am jealous of you; I know I am. But, Shirley, it is no use. You say this because you know you won't be allowed to leave us.'

'I can leave you. It is in the bond.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean that my father left a will making me absolutely my own mistress as far as my home was concerned. I elected—oh, how gladly!—to come

to this delightful English home, to be with my dear uncle and aunt, and with you, and dear Aunt Hannah, and—and all those I love; but if I choose to go I can go. I do choose.’

‘Perhaps you are going to Aunt Hannah?’

‘No; I shall go quite far away.’

‘Quite, quite far away, Shirley?’

‘So far that my influence for good or evil need not reach you.’

‘But they will find out, and they will hate me.’

‘They will know nothing. I will so arrange matters that no one will even suspect you. And now, Julia, cease to be wicked; cease to be jealous. Keep quiet for a few moments, and then come down to dinner feeling happy, knowing that Shirley Kendal will do you no real harm.’

Julia’s eyes were misty with unshed tears; her heart was beating fast. Shirley went as far as the door. She had scarcely reached it before Julia sprang after her.

‘I must if it kills me,’ she said. ‘Oh Shirley, Shirley!’

Her arms were flung round her cousin’s neck. Just for an instant she strained Shirley to her heart.

‘Perhaps I will never do it again,’ she said; ‘but just once—just because you are noble, and because you have a charm, and it has overcome me. Oh Shirley!’

Shirley dashed away her tears. The next minute she left the room, closing the door softly behind her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TWO DAYS' GRACE.



NOTHING more was said to Julia with regard to the missing letter, and in a few days she had forgotten all about it. She was considerably relieved by Shirley's determination, more particularly as her cousin kept it to herself, and no one in the least guessed what was about to happen.

On the following Monday, as the girls were leaving the room at breakfast-time, Mrs Cairns said :

'We shall be rather a staid party to-night, for my dear old friend Mrs Everett is coming to stay a few days, and Aunt Hannah is also coming to see us.'

'Oh, three cheers!' cried Shirley. 'I do so love to have Aunt Hannah in the house! We will have a right good time.'

'If it were not for your examination, girls, I could plead for a little holiday, and a few friends to be invited, and something pleasant to take place.'

'I don't care in the very least for holidays,' said Julia; 'I would much rather work.'

'And so would I,' said Shirley. 'And as to

Lily—why, look at her face, Aunt Charity, and tell me if she seems to desire a holiday.'

'You all know what I must do; you know quite well,' said Lily, colouring as she spoke.

'Yes, darling, we know, and your work shall not be disturbed. All the same, we will see. Mrs Everett and Aunt Hannah combined will certainly contrive something nice for you young people.'

The girls left the room. Lessons went on as usual, but in the course of the morning Mrs Cairns sent up a message to the schoolroom: 'Ask Miss Julia to come downstairs; I want to speak to her.'

Julia ran down at once. She found her mother in the hall.

'Julia, it is a little awkward. Your father wants me to go with him to pay an important call. Now, I intended to drive to the railway station to meet Mrs Everett. I find that I cannot do so. She will think it strange. You are the only one of our young party who knows her. I want you, dear, to go in the carriage to meet her. You will see to her comforts, dear old lady! Bring her here, and when she arrives, entertain her, give her tea, and make her comfortable.'

'Of course, mother,' said Julia, feeling very self-important.

Mrs Cairns gave some further directions. She was going away immediately with her husband.

'Be sure you tell Mrs Everett that I shall be at home not later than six o'clock; and stay with her, Julia, until I return. Of course, she

will be taken to her room, and Heron will look after her; but if she is downstairs don't leave her alone.'

'No, mother.'

Julia turned to go upstairs.

'The carriage will be round to fetch you sharp at three o'clock, my love,' said her mother. 'Good-bye, darling.'

She kissed her little daughter, and turned to her husband with a sigh of relief.

'It is nice,' she said, 'to have a dear, thoughtful little girl like Julia to depend on in moments of emergency. Fond as I am of Shirley, she is not quite so dependable as Julia. Don't you think so, Stephen?'

'As to that, my dear, I don't know. I am so fond of Shirley that I think she does everything as well as most girls.'

'You surely don't think more of her than of your own child?'

'Of course not, Charity; but I do wish my own child would not look quite so secretive as she has come to look lately.'

'I think, Stephen, you are a wee bit hard on her.'

'Perhaps I am, love. If so I am sorry. We will turn the conversation for the present at least.'

Julia went back to the schoolroom. Nobody had remarked on her absence. The other girls were hard at work, and did not raise their eyes when she came in. She resumed her place opposite her books, and continued to make slow and care-

ful notes. It would be a great triumph to win a big prize over Shirley's head. Yes, if Shirley was going, the life of torture and restraint was undoubtedly coming to an end. But still Julia's jealous feelings remained. She had felt softened for a moment or two at Shirley's magnificent act of self-surrender, but she could not help disliking her just because she was Shirley, because she was good and brave and noble.

'If I could find a fault in her—a great big fault—then I could endure life,' thought the little girl. 'And I do know a fault. She was a thief once—a thief—a common thief. In England she would have been locked up or sent to a reformatory. And she is the girl whom my father thinks most of in all the world. Oh yes, it is all very fine of her to say she will go, but perhaps she will be forced to go. Oh dear! I ought to give all this up now. I wish I wasn't so terribly wicked, but I can't—I can't help myself.'

As the girls were lunching that day Julia mentioned what her mother had given her to do.

'I am to fetch Mrs Everett from the station,' she said; 'I can't go for a walk as I intended.'

There was very little comment made with regard to this fact. Shirley, truth to tell, did not care to be any longer in Julia's society. She preferred Lily, who was becoming more passionately attached to her each hour. But this afternoon, as Lily and Shirley walked slowly together arm-in-arm, Miss Munro having declined to accompany them, Lily said:

'Shirley, I wonder'——

'What do you wonder, dear?'

'Suppose I *don't* get the prize; and suppose you don't get the prize; and suppose Julia doesn't get it.'

'That is quite a possible supposition,' said Shirley. 'There will be a great many people competing, and beyond doubt a great many of them will be cleverer than we are.'

'Then I shall be as badly off as ever,' said Lily. 'Mother says I must come home at the end of the term. She does not think it right that dear, kind Mr Cairns should be burdened with me any longer. What is to become of me?'

'You will go home cheerfully. It is very nice to have a home to go to.'

'Why do you speak in that awfully sad voice?'

'Was it awfully sad?' said Shirley, flinging a bright glance at her companion. 'Then if so I am sorry—truly sorry. I don't want to make you, dear little girl, gloomy; I love you.'

'And I love you, Shirley, so tremendously; I can't help confessing it. I used to love Julia best, but I don't now.'

'If so you ought to be ashamed of yourself,' said Shirley, speaking somewhat brusquely.

'I know you say so, but I am not. The greatest pain I shall have when I do go back is leaving you.'

'You may not have to part with me; there is no saying.'

'What do you mean?'

'I can't explain myself. Let us run to the next milestone. Come, quick! One, two, three, and away!'

Lily was a very quick runner, and Shirley's proposal put all thought of other things out of her head for the time.

Meanwhile Julia was driving staidly to the railway station. The old coachman drove his horses slowly and with care. The old brougham was snug and comfortable. Julia lay back against the cushions and thought of that day—so long ago now that it seemed like a lifetime—when she had gone to fetch Shirley home to The Grange. She remembered her feelings, so mingled, so conflicting, and yet, on the whole, so satisfactory. A companion! A cousin! A girl to patronise and, of course, to love! But the cousin would not be patronised, and the girl would not be loved in Julia's old-fashioned way. The girl was new and fresh and breezy, and Julia, from the first moment she laid eyes on her charming, laughing face, knew well that she had found in Shirley Kendal more than her match. How miserable she had been since that day! How that envious growth within her had assumed larger and larger proportions until she, Julia Cairns, a well-brought-up, a carefully trained little girl, had stooped to deeds the consequences of which were more than she could fathom—the consequences of which were all-reaching and all-enduring.

A sense of terror swept over Julia.

'Yes, there is no doubt I have done frightfully wrong,' she thought; 'and the worst thing of all

was hiding that letter and telling those awful lies about it. Then, of course, I did very, very wrong to visit that dreadful woman Mrs Kendal. She has me in her power, and she has that horrible little Georgy-Porgy as a witness. She knows that I did wish to injure Shirley. Oh no, I don't want to injure her now—I don't—I don't! She may go, as she says she will. I won't bring up that story; I won't tell father that I know something terrible about her. My conscience will rest when she is gone, for I shall remember that I could have injured her and that I did not. Oh yes, she herself cut the Gordian knot when she said that she would go.'

The carriage stopped at the station. The train was already signalled, and a few minutes later it was due. Julia stood on the platform. Little Mrs Everett got out with difficulty from her first-class compartment. Julia went to meet her; she gave her an arm, and was as attentive and sweet as girl could be.

'Ah!' said Mrs Everett, 'so you have come—you, the girl with the discontented face. Forgive me, my dear, you look—ah! no better—no better. I am very glad to meet you, and I hope that you and I may become friends. I like straightforward girls. Your mother's daughter ought to be a fine creature. Your mother was very straightforward, very good, when she was a girl. She lived with me once for over a year. I had no fault to find with her—none.'

Julia asked several questions with regard to her mother's girlhood. She wanted to keep the

ball of conversation rolling. Mrs Everett answered quite calmly, but now and then she fixed her eyes in a curious and watchful way on Julia's face. After a time Julia noticed this, and then her conversation became constrained and she no longer looked perfectly at ease.

They were just about to turn into the long avenue which led to the old Grange, when Mrs Everett faced round and addressed her little companion.

'Julia,' she said, 'I have been very much puzzled what to do. To tell the truth, when I left home to-day I made up my mind to consult your mother, or possibly your father, and not to say anything about it to you. But on second thoughts I think it but fair that you should be your own judge and make, if possible, your own explanation to me.'

'What is the matter?' said Julia.

In spite of herself she knew that the colour was leaving her cheeks, that her very lips were white, and that her eyes did not dare to look straight into Mrs Everett's. She felt, too—and very miserable did it make her—that Mrs Everett was reading her through and through. There are some people who have that faculty, and it is in many ways a very terrible one. They can read motives, they can see beneath the exterior, and that which seems to the possessor of a thought to be hidden deep in a grave is in reality perceptible to the rare souls who have got this marvellous gift of intuition and of knowledge of their kind.

Mrs Everett happened to be one of these. She was a very good woman, but a little stern. She had, however, one magnificent quality: when real repentance set in no one could be more tender, more loving to the sinner. She did not, however, regard Julia as at all a repentant young person at that moment. When first she had looked at Mrs Cairns's young daughter she had said to herself:

'That girl is not quite happy. She is hiding something, instead of being perfectly frank and open. There is something weighing on her conscience.'

The very fact that she had immediately discovered this made her take an interest in Julia, although that interest was by no means flattering to the young girl herself. Now the whitening lips, the paling cheeks, the frightened eyes appealed to her, but not at present in a very sympathetic way.

'Julia,' she said, 'you are your mother's child. It is an extraordinary fact that we always love those whom we have known when we were young. We love also the children of our old friends. I want to be your friend and to help you.'

'Stay one moment,' said Julia—'stay! There is a girl who lives with us; you have never seen her; you won't love me when you see her. She has the power of making every one love her.'

'Why do you say I will not love you when I have seen her?'

'Because you won't. Oh, it maddens me to

think of it! No one cares for me when they talk to Shirley.'

'Well, child, why should I not love you both? Shirley, whoever she is—oh yes, now I remember; she is Shirley Kendal, your father's niece—has no association with my past; therefore you have in that way a prior claim. But listen, child. Do you know that when you called to see me last week with your mother I noticed something—no, not in your eyes exactly, nor on your lips, but nevertheless I was certain that deep down in your heart you were hiding a sin.'

'Oh, don't—oh, don't! You frighten me!' said Julia.

'You were hiding a sin, little Julia, and it was making your eyes secretive. Now, it is not good for the eyes of the young to hold a secret, and it is making your manner unnatural, and neither is that good for old or young. I watched you, and I felt that you were not happy.'

'I wish you would not watch me in that terrible way; I hate it,' said Julia.

'You are a very young girl; you ought to be glad that I take an interest in you. Perhaps God means me to help you.'

'Well, go on,' said Julia in a desperate tone. 'What do you want to say?'

'I want to say that this has come into my possession.'

Mrs Everett, as she spoke, unclasped a little reticule which she held in her hand, and produced before Julia's horrified eyes the note, mud-stained and much injured, which she had

torn in two and buried, as she had hoped, for ever.

'I was walking in the garden the day after your visit,' continued Mrs Everett, 'and Pounce was with me. He is my fox-terrier. I saw him scratching away in the earth, and I went up to see what he was doing. Then he brought me these. He came up to me wagging his tail and holding them in his mouth. I took them up in wonder; for who, I thought, could want to bury a letter in my garden? And then I saw that it was a letter addressed to your father. I did not even read it. But I held it in my hand, and as I was looking at it in some amazement my under-gardener came up and said:

"You are wondering about that note, ma'am. It was the young lady put it in the ground yesterday. I was pruning the pear-trees, and I watched her. She dug quite a deep hole and put the letter in, and then covered it up."

'You see, Julia, there was a witness to prove that you did this thing. And the note is addressed to your father. There is no use your denying it. I should like to know why you did it.'

'Give me the letter, please,' said Julia, her fingers trembling.

'Certainly not. I mean to keep it. You put it into my garden, therefore it is no longer your property; it is mine.'

Mrs Everett put the torn envelope containing the letter once more into her bag. She then said calmly:

'I will return you the letter, as I see you wish to have it once more in your possession, when you tell me the truth about it, but not before.'

'Oh, Mrs Everett! if I could only coax you'——

'Spare your breath, child. I am the very last person to be coaxed to do anything that I believe it my duty not to do.'

'But will you—will you *promise* me?'

'What, my dear?' Mrs Everett looked intently at Julia. 'Julia,' she said, 'you are unhappy.'

'I am indeed.'

'You had a motive for burying that letter?'

'I wanted to get rid of it.'

'Tell me the truth, child, and I will befriend you.'

'I dare not—oh, I dare not!'

'Then how can you expect me to make you a promise? I don't know what story is attached to that letter; it may hold a most valuable piece of information. Lying lost as it does in my bag, it may be doing some one an injury. How can I tell? It was for no light reason you put the letter into the ground in my garden.'

'Give me,' said Julia in a desperate tone—'give me two days—two days from now—and I will tell you.'

'I don't know why I should agree to this.'

'Oh, please—please—I beseech—I implore of you!'

'Well,' said Mrs Everett after a pause, 'this is Monday. I will give you till Wednesday at this hour. Then I expect you to come and tell me

everything. If you don't come I shall take what steps I please, and not regard myself as in any way beholden to you to keep back the information which I can give. My course then would be to hand the letter, which is addressed to him, to your father. He surely has the best right to it.'

'Oh, two days—two days!' gasped Julia. 'In two days you may do anything if I have not told you the very truth.'

'Very well, child. You will excite yourself if you talk any more. And here we are at your pleasant home. I look forward to being with your dear mother. She is worthy of being loved, and of being the mother of a good girl. Ah, what a splendid young creature that is! Who is she, my dear?'

'Shirley, of course—Shirley,' gasped the miserable Julia.

It was with difficulty that she could recall her scattered senses in order to assist Mrs Everett out of the carriage; and so feeble were her efforts that the old lady, being much crippled with rheumatism, must have fallen had not Shirley sprung to the rescue. Her strong young arm and bright young face restored Mrs Everett to herself.

'You must be Shirley Kendal,' she said, with a smile.

'I am indeed. And you are dear Mrs Everett.'

'Hypocrite!' murmured Julia. 'Trying to win her, of course!'

But Shirley had no such idea; her nature was

so kindly that she could not help being affectionate in her manner.

After all, it was on Shirley's arm that Mrs Everett went into the house, and it was to Shirley she talked while she waited for Heron to take her to her bedroom. By-and-by, too, when she came downstairs again, it was Shirley who was waiting for her; for Julia had suddenly made up her mind that it was useless to compete with Shirley.

'I am so absolutely miserable,' she said to herself, 'that Shirley may do anything she pleases as far as Mrs Everett is concerned.'

Consequently Julia absented herself. She went into the woods, intending to gather violets. There Lily found her, but the little basket she had taken out to fill with wild-flowers was empty, and Julia herself was sitting on the broken trunk of a tree staring straight before her. Her hat was flung back on her shoulders; her face was white and woebegone, and there were stains of tears on her cheeks. Lily looked at her friend with a sensation almost of fear.

'Oh Julie, Julie!' she said, and her voice was quite loving and confiding.

Julia was so absolutely wretched now that she was glad of even a kind word.

'Sit close to me, Lily,' she said. 'Although it is early in May the air is cold.'

'Oh no; I am so hot!' said Lily.

She laid her warm hand on Julia's cold one, and then she sat close to her, nestled up against her, and put her soft cheek against her shoulder.

'I do love you, Julia,' she said.

'I wish you wouldn't talk nonsense, Lily. You know you don't. No one loves me; and I don't wonder.'

The tone, which was really full of a sort of wild contrition, struck on Lily as something new.

'Why do you speak in that way, Julia?' she said.

'Lily, I must say something; I must confide in some one. You are the safest, because it doesn't matter at all to you. I have got into a most ghastly scrape. I don't know what I shall do I am almost wild!'

'Oh Julia, I am sorry!'

'If you knew all you wouldn't be; you'd hate me just desperately. I know you'll hate me soon, for the dreadful thing can't be hidden.'

'Oh, can't it? Can nothing be done? What sort of scrape can you have got into?'

'I daren't explain. I have two days before anything will be done. I am in most awful misery. I think I shall go mad. Do you know that I am so heartily wretched that I should be glad if I could contract a dreadful fever and go off my head for a bit and forget. There's nothing I would not suffer just to hide myself. Oh Lily, Lily! And yet, you know, I'm not really sorry. I am in the queerest state. I'm not sorry a bit for what I've done, but I'm just terribly afraid of being found out. And I shall be found out, Lily—I shall.'

'Julia, I don't understand you; you frighten me.'

'Poor little, innocent, good Lily! Of course you

are frightened. Run away from me, dear; I'm not worth your talking to me.'

'But you are; indeed you are! I love you very much; I do indeed!'

'But you don't love me as much as you do Shirley.'

'No, I don't love you as much as I love Shirley; I don't pretend I do. But there can be other loves besides the greatest of all.'

'Oh, there! You are maddening me as usual. Oh, don't I just hate Shirley! What misery she has brought into my life!'

'I was thinking that perhaps she could help you.' Julia turned round fiercely.

'If you tell!' she cried. 'If you just dare to tell one word of what I have said to you to Shirley Kendal, I'll'——

'Oh, don't, Julia—don't look at me like that! Of course—of course I won't tell. Let me hold your hand.'

Lily's warm, clinging hands seemed to comfort Julia in spite of herself. After a time Lily spoke.

'Julie.'

'Well, child?'

'You say you are unhappy because of something you are afraid will be found out.'

'Of course—of course! I told you so.'

'And you are frightened?'

'Horribly.'

'Is it perhaps a sinful thing, Julie?'

'Oh yes; the world would say so. Yes, it is. Yes, Lily, I am what would be called an awful sinner.'

'Once,' said Lily, speaking after a long pause, 'I was in father's study—— May I tell you about it?'

'You may talk; I don't know that I shall listen.'

'Perhaps you will; anyhow I will say what is in my head. Once I was in father's study, and he did not know it. I had a bad cold, and I was wrapped up near the fire. We don't have as many fires as you have, for we are very poor. Oh, it was a bitter day! Presently father came in and sat by his table, and he didn't know I was there. A servant came and said that a poor woman wanted to see him. He asked the servant to show her in, and she came. I could not see her face, and I don't know whether she was old or young or anything about her, but I shall never forget her voice. It was—oh, so low and miserable! She began to say something to father in that very low tone, and as she spoke she kept on sobbing; and after a time she paused, and then father said—— You have never seen father, but he has a wonderful voice, clear like a bell; and however low he pitches it, you always hear each word, so I could not help knowing what he said. There was quite a pause, and then he turned to the woman and said:

"Is that all? Have you told me everything?"

'And I heard her answer, "Yes—oh yes, I have told you everything."

"Then this is a clear case for Christ to attend to," said father. "You have sinned, and you must repent. God will forgive your sin, and Christ will wash your heart white and clean, and you will get rest and peace."

'And then he took the woman's hand—and, oh, she sobbed so loud!—and he knelt down by her and prayed. I needn't tell you the prayer, only it made me cry. When he got up again he took the woman's hand.

"First repent and get pardoned, and then go and sin no more," he said. And the woman said to him:

"But must I tell my enemy just what I have done?"

'And father said, "Yes; you must confess and repent, and sin no more."

'And then he took her hand once more and led her out of the study.'

CHAPTER XXV.

‘THERE IS NO WAY OUT.’



UNT HANNAH arrived in time for dinner. She was gay and her most charming self. She and Mrs Everett were old friends, and were delighted to meet again. Mrs Cairns was, however, feeling rather annoyed. She loved Shirley, of course, but not as well as she loved her own only child. She had given Julia every chance to make friends with Mrs Everett. She wanted the lady who had been good to her in her youth to be good to her child, and she thought, ‘Although my Julia has not got that indefinable charm which Shirley possesses, nevertheless, if she is first in the field and is really attentive to my old friend, that old friend will love her and understand her.’

Mrs Cairns had comforted herself with these thoughts during the round of visits which she was paying with her husband. She got home later than she intended, and went quickly into the house. She expected, of course, that Julia and the old lady would be having a cosy time in her own boudoir. Julia might be reading to Mrs Everett; or at any rate she would be sitting near and talking to her. But what Mrs Cairns did see was Mrs Everett in the hall, comfortably shaded from all draughts

by a glass screen, her feet stretched out near the glowing warmth of a great fire, and Shirley at her feet. Shirley, her bright hair curling about her shoulders and surrounding her face, her face itself looking as beautiful as any young face could, was talking in low tones to Mrs Everett. She was making her laugh; she was making her forget her rheumatism. When Mr and Mrs Cairns appeared Shirley jumped up.

‘I think Mrs Everett is quite happy and comfortable,’ she said. ‘You don’t mind my talking to her? Julia, I fancy, had a headache.’

‘Oh yes,’ thought Mrs Cairns to herself; ‘and now, of course, Shirley will be first with Mrs Everett. Poor little Julie! it is hard on her.’

When they were alone Mrs Everett turned to Mrs Cairns and said:

‘I am not at all surprised that you are all fascinated with that dear child. She is a very dear child; I have seldom been more attracted by any one.’

‘I did hope,’ said Mrs Cairns, forgetting herself for a moment and speaking out her true heart, ‘that you would have preferred my little Julia.’

Mrs Everett looked at her.

‘I pity you, Charity,’ she said. ‘Your child has doubtless her own good points, but you cannot put her in the same category with Shirley Kendal; she belongs to a different order.’

Then Mrs Cairns went away to her own room, and felt really cross with Shirley for the first time.

But at dinner-time all the girls were fresh and

animated—Julia in particular. She seemed to have entered on a new phase of being. She no longer suppressed herself; she brought every scrap of power, of knowledge, of individuality she possessed to the fore. She talked and she laughed. She tossed her head and opened her eyes to their widest extent, and, in short, managed to electrify her parents. What had come to her? Miss Munro looked at her with some disapproval, but Mr and Mrs Cairns were delighted. Aunt Hannah, too, often capped her gay sallies with better ones of her own. Mrs Everett cast two or three shrewd glances at her, and said to herself:

'The lass has pluck, after all. Perhaps she will tell me the truth at the end of the two days;' and then she gave her a favouring tap on the arm.

'Well done, little Julia!' she said. 'That story was as well expressed as any I have ever listened to. I am glad that you are your mother's own child; she could tell a good story in her youth.'

'Alas!' said Mrs Cairns, 'that art is now almost forgotten; but I am glad that Julia is likely to be a good talker.'

As soon as ever Julia began to exert herself and, as it were, to come forward, Shirley seemed to shrink into her shoes. She scarcely spoke, except now and then in a low tone to Lily. As for Lily, she was watching both girls with her heart in her mouth. What did it all mean? She had a fearful longing and desire with regard to Julia, but she was in the dark as to the trouble which was breaking Julia's heart.

‘Oh, if only she would confide in Shirley!’ thought the little girl.

But in the drawing-room Miss Jeffries decided that Julia had had her innings long enough. She asked Shirley first to play and then to sing; and then, of course, the usual thing happened. Every one hung upon her words. All ears listened to the brilliant touch; all owned to a sense of regret when the music ceased.

‘This is something worth hearing,’ said Mrs Everett. ‘I don’t know when I have enjoyed anything so much.—You have a very pretty voice, my dear. You are going to have it well trained, I make no doubt.’

‘It is quite sufficiently trained for me,’ said Mr Cairns. ‘I hate over-trained voices.’

‘So do I. The pretty simplicity of Shirley’s voice is what makes it so agreeable.—I wonder, my dear, if you know any of the old songs?’

‘I know a great many songs,’ said Shirley. ‘What special ones do you mean?’

‘There is that sweet thing, “I’ll hang my harp on a willow-tree;” and that still sweeter one—the dearest song in the world—“She wore a wreath of roses the night when first we met.”’

‘I can sing that one,’ said Shirley. ‘I know it by heart. I used to sing it often when I was in Paris.’

She sang the old-fashioned song, and Mrs Everett felt the tears stealing under her eyelids and rolling down her cheeks.

Presently the little party said good-night to each other, and Julia, Shirley, and Lily found

themselves upstairs. Julia went at once to her own room. She scarcely spoke to the other girls. Shirley took Lily's hand and drew the girl into her own apartment.

'Lily,' she said, 'what is the matter? I know you know. Tell me.'

'I can't,' said Lily in a breathless sort of way; 'I promised. Julia told me in part, but she made me promise not to tell you.'

'It is very bad, I'm afraid,' said Shirley.

'I'm afraid it is; but I oughtn't to say a word—not a word.'

'I understand, Lily. I have never encouraged you to love me better than Julia, have I?'

'Oh no, indeed you haven't, Shirley. You have told me that it was wrong.'

'Nevertheless, there was a time when I felt proud of the fact that I could draw your affections to myself. I have not been blameless in the matter. I am very unhappy about Julia. If something isn't done soon she may get an illness. I could not bear the look on her face to-night.'

'The time when she tried me most of all,' said Lily, 'was at dinner. She wasn't natural, was she?'

'No. I am puzzled; I wish you could advise me.'

'Why don't you go to her, Shirley? Tell her that you suspect something, and get her to tell you. Put out all your great, great charm, Shirley; exercise every one of your powers. Tell her—oh! tell her that you love her. I am sure she is worth loving; and she is very unhappy. Won't you go to her?'

‘I don’t know. I’ll think what I had best do. Good-night, Lily. Go to bed. Don’t get hollows in your cheeks; don’t get worn out. I do want you most earnestly to win that big prize.’

Lily went to bed, but she could not sleep. Shirley stood by her fire lost in anxious thought. After a time she softly opened her door and went along the passage. She tapped at Julia’s door; Julia said, ‘Come in,’ and she entered.

Julia had flung the window wide open, and, dressed in a very thin cotton dressing-jacket, stood half-leaning out. The night was very cold for the time of year; there was an east wind blowing. As Shirley opened the door the curtains were swayed backwards and forwards. Shirley ran quickly forward, took Julia by her two shoulders, shut the window with a bang, drew the curtains, and then ran to the bed, picked up a woollen shawl, and wrapped it round the little girl.

‘Do you want to catch your death?’ she said. Her voice was stern.

‘Oh, it doesn’t matter. I wish you wouldn’t interfere,’ said Julia. ‘At least my room is my own.’

‘No, it isn’t your own when you mean to half-kill yourself. You might get an awful chill.’

‘That’s what I wanted to get.’

‘Julia, come here.’

‘I won’t go to you; I hate you.’

‘I know you do, Julia; but, all the same, you must let me talk to you.’

‘Why should you come to me now? It is so late—nearly twelve o’clock. You ought to be in bed.’

'If I sleep in any bed to-night it will be in that bed, by your side,' said Shirley. 'Now look here, Julia; you are my cousin.'

'It is my hateful knowledge to know that I am.'

'I as your cousin have a certain duty towards you. I have made you unhappy. You know very well that I am going away. I can't see why you should be so wretched; you might put up with me for the few weeks longer that I shall be here.'

'It isn't that,' said Julia, wringing her hands. 'It is all too late now. I'd never have done it but for you; you were the cause. But whether you go or stay won't make any matter now.'

'What won't make any matter?'

'Why, simply I shall die of misery and disgrace.'

'Disgrace, Julia—disgrace?'

'Yes, Shirley—yes—disgrace. Oh! I can't confide in you any more than I could confide in Lily. It was very mean of her to tell you. She promised she would not, but of course she did. You'd get a secret out of any one but me. Your charm never affected me; I never cared for you.'

'Alas, no, Julia! you never did. But, all the same, the time has come for me to help you. And I will,' continued the girl—'whatever happens, I will.'

'You can do nothing,' said Julia in a languid tone.

'I could if you will confide in me. If you won't, of course, I can do nothing.'

Julia sat and shivered.

'What is it, Julie? You are really enough to try the temper of any one. Here am I full of

resource, not at all a stupid sort of girl, and all agog to help you, and yet you turn from me and hate me. How silly you would think it of a drowning person not to seize the rope because an enemy held it! And I am not your enemy. I believe I hold the rope to pull you safe and firm to land. Come now, Julie, you cannot keep it up. Your heart is so burdened that you can bear yourself no longer. Tell me the truth.’

Long years afterwards—all through her life, indeed—did Julia wonder what spell Shirley exercised that night. But before she knew what she was doing she began to sob; and when she had sobbed for some time, and Shirley had stolen her arms round her neck, Julia at first resisting it and then yielding to the pressure, she began to speak. She told Shirley the story—not everything—not her own motive in going to Hillingborough without her father, but she told her that she had hidden the letter and buried it in Mrs Everett’s garden, that Mrs Everett’s dog had dug it out again, and that Mrs Everett now held it in her possession, and in two days Julia must tell her the truth or she herself would disclose what she knew.

‘I told so many lies,’ said Julia at last—‘such great lies, all of them. And father would never forgive anybody who told lies. What is to be done? There is no way out—none—none!’

‘I must think,’ said Shirley, whose face was very pale—‘I must think; and I will let you know in the morning.’

‘But, Shirley, you can see no way out; there is none.’

'I will let you know in the morning. Come, I am going to put you to bed now. Oh, how you tremble, and how cold you are! Do you know that I mean to sleep with you to-night? I'll just run to my own room and get my night-dress.'

Shirley dashed off to her room, and came back in a minute. Oh, she was pretty, and she was sweet and brave and good! Julia knew all about it. Just for a time she did not hate her. She was glad she had told. It was better to confide in Shirley than in Lily. She could not really confide in Lily, but she could in Shirley. Shirley knew so much of life, and she was so calm and so assured and so full of tact; and, above all things, she would never, never betray her.

After a time the two girls lay down side by side, and Julia—unhappy, miserable little Julia—fell asleep in Shirley's kind arms.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SHIRLEY'S PLANS.



WHILE Julia slept Shirley formed her plans. By the morning she had formed them with the usual decision which characterised her. She did not stop to fret, nor even to think very deeply.

‘I can think and fret presently,’ she said to herself; ‘now I have to act. There are only two days. Before two days are over Julia must be cleared. She shall be cleared.’

Shirley’s face grew bright.

‘Perhaps, after all, she will learn to love me,’ she said to herself. ‘Strange that I should want her love! Ever since I came she has been a thorn in my side. But by my coming I have injured her. She used to be a nice, amiable, gentle little girl—the sort of refined English girl that one meets with every day, that one respects—a girl who ought to make her parents happy. Now she is not a good girl; she is wicked. It is owing to me. I have always had an adventurous life; I expect my adventures will begin again. But it doesn’t matter; I see my duty quite plain. The time has come for me to forget myself.’

Shirley slipped away from Julia while she slept,

and went to her own room. She put on her clothes. As she did so she said to herself:

'Here am I dressing just as if nothing at all was going to happen; and yet I know that I shall never sleep in that dear little bed any more, nor kiss Julia nor little Lily any more, nor put my hand inside dear, dear Uncle Stephen's arm, nor even see Aunt Hannah. And that is not the worst. They will not even be sorry; they will be glad that I am away. Oh, it is bitter! And yet it seems to be my duty.'

Shirley presently finished her dressing, and then she went downstairs. The cat and the kittens still inhabited the pretty room that Mrs Cairns had put aside for them. The kittens were really no longer kittens, but handsome young cats, and Shirley had been persuaded to offer them to different people. Aunt Hannah was going to take Pop. Honora Ffrench had long besought Shirley to make Drop her property.

'I shall give away my kitties this very morning,' thought the girl; 'and I know Aunt Charity, even if she no longer will love me, will take care of my pussy herself. I should like to take Mopsy—my darling, my pet—with me, but it wouldn't be safe. Whom shall I give Mordecai to? I might leave a note asking Aunt Hannah to have him. I dare not give him away before I go; that would never do.'

She sat down in the middle of the floor and called her cats round her; she opened Mordecai's cage, and he came out and perched on her shoulder. Mops, who also shared the room with the cats,

growled and then dashed forward and played with Shirley. She forgot her misery as she sat thus surrounded by her treasures.

'I don't come to you, my dearies, quite so often as I did,' she said aloud, 'because I am such a busy girl. Once you were almost everything that I possessed, and now I must give you up too—yes, all of you. And I will never care for any cats or any dog or any parrot again—never—just because of you, sweet, dear darlings!'

Mordecai began to talk in his funny way.

'You are a very bad young thing,' he said; and Shirley laughed and scratched his neck with her finger.

'It's all nonsense,' she thought; 'I've got to be as hard as nails to-day, and just do what I mean to do, but Julia will be saved.'

As Shirley left the room where she kept her menagerie she came face to face with Aunt Hannah.

'What an early bird you are, Shirley!' said the good lady. 'Are you having a game with your animals, dear?'

'That is just it, Aunt Hannah. Will you come into my menagerie, please? I want you to choose which of my precious kitties you really prefer.'

'You know, dear, I long ago told you that I wished to be the possessor of Pop. You won't sell him, or I am prepared to give you a good sum for such a handsome cat.'

'I wouldn't sell him for all the world,' said Shirley, a husky, choking tone in her voice. 'I am very glad that you should care for him.'

'Then I will take him home with me when I return this afternoon.'

'Are you going this afternoon? That's a very good thing,' said the young girl.

'What did you say, my dear?'

'Nothing—at least, I didn't mean you to hear.'

'You said, "What a good thing!" Shirley. I heard you say it distinctly. What do you mean, darling? I always thought you had a penchant for Aunt Hannah.'

'I love you,' said the girl. 'Let me give you a hug—just one quick hug. And don't look at me too earnestly; and don't think anything about me. To-day I am in one of my queer fits. I often used to have these moods, although since I came here I have been so happy that they come more and more seldom. Kiss me. I want one great, *big*, loving hug, and then I'll be as strong as a lion.'

'You attract me very much, Shirley. I love you very dearly,' said the old lady; and then she kissed Shirley, and stooping down, patted Pop on his beautiful thick ruff, and then she left the menagerie.

At breakfast on that special morning Shirley was more lively than ever. Her gay sallies were more full of wit, her laughter more infectious. Every one at the table noticed her. No one could do anything but love her; she looked so radiant, her laugh was so genial, her gentle, affectionate manner so marked. In particular did Shirley attract Mrs Everett. That good lady could scarcely keep her eyes off the sweet face.

Soon after breakfast Shirley ran upstairs to Miss Munro.

'I want you to give me a holiday,' she said. 'You know I have never asked for one since I became your pupil.'

'Well, dear'——

'Oh, please!' said Shirley; and that 'please' caused the governess, firm as she was as a rule, to relent.

'It is true you have never asked for one.'

'Then you will give it to-day?'

Shirley kissed her lightly and left the room.

'Girls,' said Miss Munro, turning to her other pupils, 'we must work extra hard without Shirley. It does not really much matter so clever a girl having a holiday now and then, for she always makes up by working doubly hard. You two will have to rouse yourselves to the utmost if you mean to surpass her in the matter of the great competition.'

The others did work as Miss Munro wanted them; but Julia had a very strange, uneasy sensation at her heart. Shirley was going to manage, but how—in what fashion?

Meanwhile Shirley roamed about the house looking for Mrs Everett. She found that lady at last seated in a small boudoir which Mrs Cairns had given up to her use. Although the weather was warm there was a fire, for the old lady wanted a great deal of heat. She was sitting close to it now. Shirley closed the door, and when she had done so she deliberately turned the key in the lock. She then proceeded to draw the velvet

portière across the doorway, and coming forward, dropped on her knees by Mrs Everett's side. Mrs Everett looked at her in some astonishment.

'What is the matter, dear?' she said; but then she smiled, overcome by that fascinating, eager gaze, and stroked the soft, rounded cheek affectionately.

'Once, long, long ago,' she said, 'I had a child—a little daughter. She lived to be three years old; then God took her quite suddenly and without warning. She was well one hour and dead the next. I have often wondered, Shirley Kendal, whom you reminded me of. I know now that the person was my little baby girl, who has been so long with the angels. She went—oh! many years ago. Were she alive now she would be an elderly woman, nearly as old as Julia's mother. But she went in her sweetness and her innocence, a little unopened bud. God took her away to the heavenly gardens, and there she lives, and there I shall meet her again. You remind me of her now, little girl. From the first you have attracted me. She had that dancing glance, and that peculiar form of the eyebrow which means at once spirit and joy. Oh yes, now I understand.'

Shirley took the old lady's hand and raised it slowly to her lips; she kissed it and held it between her own. Then she said:

'I am glad. This makes things easier.'

'What do you mean, my dear?' said Mrs Everett, altering her tone, and becoming shrewd and even a trifle suspicious.

'I locked the door,' said Shirley. 'You noticed that?'

'I wondered what you were doing drawing that *portière* across it.'

'I wanted to be quite alone with you.'

'Well, my dear child, and what about lessons?'

'I have begged for a holiday, just because I wished to be alone with you.'

'My dear little girl, that is a pleasure to me. Sit down at my feet, then, and let us talk.'

'I don't want to talk much; I want to plead.'

Mrs Everett smiled. 'I can't in the very least imagine what you can have to plead with me, but I can assure you that if it is right I will grant your request. I feel that I owe a duty to my little lamb who is waiting for me in heaven, and that duty prompts me to be kind to you.'

'You are good,' said Shirley. Tears came near her eyes, but did not quite rise to them. Then she said slowly, 'Julia told me all about that letter.'

'Ah!' said Mrs Everett, her manner changing instantly, 'she did, did she? To be frank with you, Shirley, I am not fond of Julia.'

'That is because you don't know her. She is a very, very nice girl in reality.'

'You must allow me to judge of that. She is secretive. As she has told you the story, it doesn't matter my talking about it. Why should she bury a letter addressed to her father? And why should she bury it in my garden?'

'Well,' said Shirley after a pause, 'it is not

exactly the kind of thing that I should personally do; but then I have no fear—I never had. Julia has, and it is very unlucky. But, strange as it may seem, I am partly to blame about that letter. Yes, I am. I owe a great deal to Julia, for I have made havoc of her life. And now I want, as a very great favour, to ask you something.'

'Well, dear, what is it?'

'I want you to promise that you will not tell anybody about that letter. I want you to forget it; or, better still, to give it to me.'

'I can't do that, really, Shirley. I made arrangements with Julia. She is to come to me in a couple of days and to tell me the absolute truth. I must be guided by what she says.'

'I do not want her to come to you. Before the two days are up there will be a different complexion put upon many things. I want you to just promise me. Will you? You won't regret it; you won't indeed.'

'Shirley, notwithstanding your brightness, you look sorry. *Are* you sorry about anything?'

'I shall be very, very sorry if you don't grant my request. I want you to forget about that letter. Things will be all right, I can assure you; and Julia will be good, and she will never do anything underhand again—never—never. I want you—oh! I want you to be kind, and to do what I ask.'

Mrs Everett had always prided herself on being a woman of iron resolves. She could be kind, but it was also in her nature to be a little severe. Perhaps if that little darling who had

been her one treasure had lived things might have been different. But the removal of her tender little plant to the heavenly garden had to a certain extent seared the mother's heart. She had always been a good and brave and very virtuous woman, but she would have been more good and soft and sympathetic had little Marjory lived. Little Marjory had died, and the mother had never felt a real softening of her heart until she saw Shirley. Now, strange as it may seem, it was Marjory who seemed to speak, not Shirley; and Marjory's voice was distinct and clear, and it said over and over and over:

'Just forget your own wisdom, and your own prudence, and all the knowledge of your long life, and yield—yield to Shirley Kendal.'

By-and-by Mrs Everett cried a little, and then she put her arms round Shirley and kissed her, and she said:

'If ever you want a home, come to me.'

And Shirley kissed her in return, and was very grave and solemn, more as though she were an old woman and Mrs Everett a young girl. But before Shirley left the room Mrs Everett had given her the promise.

'Now it is all right,' thought Shirley. 'Now things are smooth.'

In the course of the morning she ran into Julia's room.

'You needn't be frightened,' she said. 'I have had a talk with Mrs Everett, and she has decided to do nothing.'

'What?' said Julia.

She glanced full at her cousin. Shirley's cheeks had bright patches of colour on them; she looked very much perturbed.

'What?' said Julia again. 'How did you do it? You—Shirley!'

'Yes—I, Shirley. You won't think so badly of me, will you, in the future? The others may not understand, but you will, and you will be my advocate. You won't allow them to say too cruel things about me. You will remember how you disliked the thought of having them said about you. I know I am a popular girl; I can't help it; and I want you to be my ally, my friend, in the future.'

'Shirley,' said Julia, 'you are extraordinary. But don't talk about yourself now; this is my affair. This has been my terrible, terrible sin and trouble.'

'Nobody will think of it again. You will be prime favourite once more, and—— Kiss me, and don't ask any questions. I am rather busy; it is all right.'

Shirley went up to Julia. She kissed her once or twice, and then left the room.

When Julia found herself alone she stood for a minute or two by the open window.

'I am so glad that I don't know myself,' she whispered. 'And yet there is something about Shirley that frightens me. Is she in her right mind? What can be the matter? Oh, is it true that I am safe—is it true?'

After lunch the little party went off to have a long afternoon's gathering of primroses and cow-

slips in the neighbouring woods. Shirley exerted herself immensely on this occasion, and came home with great bunches of cowslips, primroses, wild violets, and other spring flowers. When the girls got back they arranged these in all the vases and flower-baskets they could find. Shirley in especial made a wonderful basketful of delicate wild violets for Mrs Everett's acceptance. She left it on the table for Mrs Everett to see, and put a tiny card just within—'With Shirley's love.'

'But I mustn't draw attention to things,' said the girl to herself.

It was, after all, when bedtime came that Shirley took her final step. She began by writing a long letter. The letter was to her uncle; and when she had finished the letter and put it in an envelope, and sealed it with some pretty pink wax which her aunt had given her a few days before, she looked at it very gravely and said to herself:

'What sort of girl am I to have such complex feelings—to admire even my dear little stamp and my pretty wax at a moment like this?'

Then she kissed the letter. 'For his dear hands will touch it,' she thought, 'and I love him so much.'

Her next step was to pack a few things in a small hand-bag.

'I shall not want many clothes in the future,' thought Shirley; and then she changed the white evening-frock, with its dainty embroideries, which she had been wearing, and put on her oldest blue

serge. Then she opened a cabinet in her room and took from it several valuable jewels.

'I must sell these,' she thought; 'I know they will fetch a good price.'

She tacked the jewels into the front of her dress. This occupied her some little time. There came a tap at her door when she was so employed, but she did not answer it; she trusted that whoever the person was would go away to bed. She had in reality said good-bye to every one before the night came, and she did not wish to undergo this torture again.

Having sewn the jewels into her dress, she next counted her money. She had a five-pound note and a ten-pound note, and about ten pounds in gold. In all her money came to about twenty-five pounds.

'I shall do,' she thought. 'These jewels will be worth, say, about a hundred and fifty pounds. I must go away so completely that they won't find me for a little. When my money is spent I can write. They will never want to have me back again, and Julia will be all right. When I write to Uncle Stephen he will arrange to allow me what money I require. This isn't a case of poverty, but it is a case of doing without much for a short time.'

Having finished her small preparations, Shirley knelt down in her chamber.

'I am doing right, not wrong,' she said to herself. 'I think God will help me. It is a great, great surrender, and I didn't suppose that the time would ever come when I could do it. But

it is best to be done, and I can only do it in the one way. I must make them feel that I am not worthy of them.'

She prayed to God, asking Him to help her and to give her courage, and then she opened the window and let herself out on to a small parapet which ran along the wall. It took a very short time to reach a thick, very strong arm of ivy which Shirley had examined during the day. She knew exactly where to put her feet, and in a very short time she found herself safe on the ground outside the house.

She then walked quickly, keeping in the shadow and avoiding the moonlit part of the road. She reached the station soon after midnight, was told that there was a train up to London between one and two o'clock, and, having taken her ticket, she sat very still and quiet waiting for the train. No one specially noticed her. Indeed, except for a very sleepy porter, there was no one about. Shirley felt as she sat thus—when all the people she loved were sleeping soundly in their warm beds, and none of them (not even Mordecai and Mops and the cats) realising that they might never behold her again—that she was living through the bitterness of death.

'Why did I ever come when it hurts me so to go?' she thought. 'But things were too good, too happy, and I know I am doing right to give Julia her chance.'

It did not occur to Shirley that she might have given Julia her chance in another fashion. She was not troubled with doubts with regard to her

conduct; she only thought that it was exceedingly difficult, and that she was doing the best thing, on the whole, for every one.

By-and-by there was a little bustle in the station. The signal-lights changed, the stationmaster made his appearance, the gas was turned brightly on, and in a few minutes a heavy parliamentary train slowed into the station. The porter now came up to Shirley and told her that this train would take her to London. He also said:

‘It is a very slow train, miss, and you won’t get to the end of your journey before far on in the morning.’

‘That’s all right,’ said Shirley, who had made her plans, and was surprised about nothing.

She had taken a first-class ticket, and was put into a compartment by the obliging porter. Immediately afterwards the train started, and the little girl turned to look about her. Seated at the opposite side of the carriage was a lady of middle age. She had a lot of books and rugs and the usual paraphernalia of travelling all round her. She raised her sleepy eyes when the girl appeared.

‘I hope,’ she said, ‘you won’t object to the screen being put over the lamp. I have had a very long journey and am intensely tired. Do you mind?’

‘Why, of course not,’ said Shirley brightly.

She jumped up herself to arrange the screen, and the lady thanked her in a less surly tone. Shirley then sat down at the opposite end of the carriage and watched this woman during the long

hours of the fast-flying morning with a sort of fascination.

'She is a funny-looking person,' thought Shirley; 'and yet I suppose she is the sort of woman whom I might be a companion to. But no, I won't—at least not yet. I have another plan in my head.'

By-and-by the lady awoke and roused herself. She looked again at Shirley, and said:

'Are you cold, my dear?'

'A little cold,' answered the girl.

'You are travelling without a rug. How thoughtless of me! I have two or three. Take one and be comfortable.'

Shirley thanked her.

'Are your feet cold?'

'A little,' said Shirley again.

'And here have I been keeping the hot-water can to myself. This carriage isn't heated as most of them are now, but the guard gave me a fresh hot-water can at the station before you got in. This is an intolerable train, drawing up at each station as we pass. Well, share the can, my dear; it is quite hot still.'

In order to do this Shirley was obliged to cross the carriage and seat herself opposite the lady.

'You can push back the screen from the lamp if you like. I am no longer sleepy.'

'Thank you,' said Shirley.

She saw now that her companion had a cold, handsome, high-bred face. The lady in her turn looked full at the young girl. Even in her shabby dress Shirley's appearance was not that of the

ordinary child. There was great pathos now in the charming little face, for during that long journey Shirley had lived through the bitterest hours of her life.

'Is anything troubling you?' said the lady, bending forward and looking attentively at the little girl.

'I am going through rather a painful time,' said Shirley in a low voice.

'It seems very strange that you should be travelling alone in the middle of the night.'

'It isn't a bit stranger than the thing I have got to do,' was Shirley's answer.

'Will you tell me, dear?' said the lady, now speaking in a low, sympathetic tone.

'I should like to, madam, but I must not.'

'Why so? I should respect your confidence.'

'I think you would, but I must not give it; it would not be right.'

'I am a little anxious about you, child. The fact is, your face troubles me. Have you friends to meet you when you get to London?'

'No; but that does not matter, for I am going straight to Hillingborough.'

'To Hillingborough?' said the lady. 'But you got into the train at a station comparatively near to Hillingborough. Why go to it from London?'

'That is my plan,' said Shirley. 'I am going to Hillingborough to see a lady who is a relation of mine. She doesn't expect me, but that doesn't matter. I am going to her by the very first train that will take me.'

'Are you a schoolgirl?'

‘No.’

‘I scarcely like to say it, but have you run away from your home?’

Shirley’s eyes filled now with sudden tears. Brimful they became, and all of a sudden she bent forward, buried her head in the cushions of the carriage, and burst into choking sobs—the difficult sobs of one who would not cry except under great pressure—the difficult sobs of one who had been repressing those tears for hours.

‘You must not pity me,’ she said in a choking voice. ‘It doesn’t matter to you. It is awful, awful trouble, but it is the only right thing to do. You don’t suppose that it could be right for a girl to run away; but although you are much older than I am, and probably very wise, you cannot know quite everything; and it is right—yes, it is right.’

The lady’s astonishment was beyond words. She was, in truth, by no means a sympathetic person, but Shirley’s tears roused her to the fact that she had met a girl who was by no means ordinary. It needed only one glance to assure her that her little fellow-traveller was a lady by birth. It needed but a second glance to show her that the child was beautiful, interesting, sweet. And now this trouble, the strangeness of the whole thing, the forlorn look on the young face, and the absolute misery in the words appealed to her.

‘I am not one to preach,’ said the lady then. ‘It is true my husband is a clergyman, but I don’t specially hold with half the things that he thinks essential to life. I am considered a broad-

minded woman, and I believe I am a cold one. But I do know one thing, little girl—whose name I have not even yet heard—and that is this.'

'What?' said Shirley.

'It is never right to do evil in order to effect good. Don't run away with the idea that it is. And it can never, never, under any circumstances, be the correct thing for a little girl of your age to run away from her home.'

'You don't know, so you can't say,' was Shirley's response.

'I do know. I have had temptations in my day. We don't come to forty years of age without knowing a great deal about life. I know, and I tell you, little girl, that it is never right to do wrong in order to effect good. It never yet succeeded; it never can.'

Shirley had dried her tears now, and she was looking at the lady.

'You see,' she said after a pause, when her companion had ceased to speak, 'it isn't a question about me. I don't matter in the very least. It is a question about another. Oh! I can't tell you any more. It would make that other person all right, and I decided that it was the best and only thing to do; and I have done it, and no one can hinder me. I am not thinking about myself at all. Don't you understand?'

'I do understand. But if you have left a loved home—— Is it a loved home?'

Shirley nodded; she could not speak.

'And those who love you?'

Another nod, and a look of misery on the little face.

'They do love me,' she said in a whisper.

'And you love them?'

'Oh, don't ask me!'

'Then when they find that you have gone, think of their unhappiness.'

'They will be sad for a little time. Oh! you *don't* understand.'

'I understand enough to make me positively certain that you are a very foolish and mistaken little girl. You may be thinking you are doing a fine thing, but it is not fine at all. Won't you allow me to influence you?'

'Thank you very much, but I am going to see my relation at Hillingborough.'

'I have a very great mind to go with you.'

Shirley looked at the lady in alarm.

'My name is Mrs Temple. My husband is the Rev. Arthur Temple. He is the vicar of a very fashionable church in Kensington, and knows all sorts of people. May I take you to see him before you go to this relation?'

'I am afraid not. Right or wrong, I must go on with what I am doing.'

It was just at this moment that the lady stooped forward as though she were arranging her rug. She kept her hand just for an instant longer than was necessary on the floor. When she raised her head again her face was red, but there was a satisfied expression in her eyes. Shirley watched her without in the least understanding why such a remarkable change should

come over her face. After a time the little girl spoke.

'You see that I must go my own way, and I beg and beseech of you not to interfere. Just let me do it, and in my own way.'

For reply Mrs Temple fixed her eyes on Shirley.

'You are mistaken,' she said; 'but perhaps it is best for you to go to Hillingborough.'

Soon afterwards the train arrived at Paddington. Mrs Temple got up and held out her hand to Shirley.

'Now listen,' she said. 'I know you are mistaken. You are doing wrong that good may come, but at the same time I give you credit for being actuated by the best motives. We may meet again—there is no saying; but whether we meet or whether we don't, I shall think of you, little girl with the bright eyes. And I now ask you to kiss me before we part.'

Shirley did kiss her.

'I could love you,' she said. 'Oh, it is easy for me to love, and I could love you much.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

A PLAN THAT FAILED.



SHIRLEY KENDAL arrived at Hillingborough between eleven and twelve o'clock that day. How she got there she never explained to any one. As soon as she set foot on the platform she engaged a cab and drove straight to Mrs Kendal's house. Mrs Kendal was out, but Shirley said that she would wait until her relation returned.

The girl went up to the little sitting-room and sat down on a high chair. She glanced round her. The furniture of the room, the appearance of everything, could not impress her favourably. She was accustomed to the comforts and the dignity of her late home. There was nothing lavish or extravagant about The Grange, but it was the home of gentlefolks, and had been the home of gentlefolks for generations. The old furniture bore proof of its good origin, and what new things were bought from time to time were the very best of their kind.

Now, Lydia Kendal was a woman who possessed flashy taste. She was renting the drawing-room floor of a very small and insignificant house. She had taken these rooms unfurnished, and had filled them with the sort of cheap and vulgar

upholstery which best pleased her. There was the conventional but almost forgotten rep-covered sofa. There were the six rep-covered chairs, the two easy-chairs, and the round table in the centre. On the round table was a stand of artificial fruit covered with a glass shade. There were also several mats, a large photograph-album, and a souvenir-book which Mrs Kendal had brought from Brazil, and which she greatly prized. The room was further bedizened with fans of every sort and shape. They were of the cheapest possible kind, and not only adorned the walls, but studded the ceiling. These fans seemed to get on Shirley's brain and to irritate her. She said to herself once or twice:

'I am determined not to complain. Things like these are mere trifles, but I do wish Lydia had better taste.'

At that moment there was a noise heard downstairs. A child ran quickly up to the drawing-room, burst open the door and looked at Shirley, half-smiled, and then came into the room.

'Here I am, Georgy,' said Shirley. 'You may give me a kiss if you are a very good boy.'

'You are pretty,' said Georgy; and he ran up to Shirley and kissed her two or three times. Then he pressed up close to her and offered her his damp and very dirty little hand to hold. In the centre of the said hand there reposed a peppermint-drop, so Shirley did not feel very eager to clasp it.

'You ought to go and wash your hands,' she said. 'See how sticky they are.'

Georgy intended to frown, as was his wont, but when Shirley spoke he only smiled, and flew away to do her bidding.

‘Mother, there’s a very pretty lady in the drawing-room,’ he said; and at that instant Lydia Kendal came in.

Mrs Kendal’s astonishment at seeing Shirley was only equal to her fear. She wondered what had happened, and if Shirley knew how she had, as it were, betrayed her. It was her object now to keep well with Shirley. She said at once:

‘How are you, Shirley? What have you come about? You may not believe it, but I assure you I am altogether your friend. That horrid, spiteful little Julia Cairns came here one day and—— But I suppose I ought not to say it. She didn’t get much change out of me. You can tell Miss Jeffries all about it, Shirley. I suppose she has made inquiries with regard to my references now, and sees what a kind-hearted woman I am, and how hard I work—in short, how respectable I am in every way.—Run away, Georgy-Porgy; run away immediately. Don’t stand sneaking at the door. Go out, sir.’

‘But I want to come in,’ said Georgy. ‘I want to kiss the pretty lady and to hold her hand.’

‘You shall hold my hand as long as you like presently, Georgy,’ said his cousin; ‘but run out now, please, for I have something to say to your mother. Ah!’ added Shirley, seeing expectancy on the boy’s small face, ‘here’s sixpence. What will Georgy buy with it?’

A radiant look flashed across the little countenance, and the boy vanished. The moment he did so Mrs Kendal began again to reiterate all her good qualities, her faithfulness to Shirley, and her desire to stand well with Miss Jeffries.

‘I ought to know soon what Miss Jeffries means to do,’ she said. ‘She declared that day when you and she came to visit me—and you were both so hugely suspicious in your conduct—she declared that if I would, as it were, keep my own counsel, and provided my references were all right—which of course they are, and more than all right—she’d start me in a business. I’ve been thinking what I’d like. I have a nice turn for dress-making, and if she’d set me up with a hundred pounds or so I’d do well. There’ll be no call for me to leave here, for I might as well dress-make in these rooms as anywhere else; and Georgy could go on at his day-school and his Sunday-school. He’s a very sharp little chap, although he has a teasing way when people go against him. He likes you, though, Shirley. It’s wonderful. I never saw the little chap take so quickly to anybody before. Well, that’s what I think I’d like to do—dressmaking. If Miss Jeffries will give me a hundred pounds I will start it next week; there’s no time to be lost. And if I get really good customers I’ll have a fashionable assistant to cut out, and make things swim. What do you say, Shirley?’

Shirley rose suddenly to her feet.

‘Lydia,’ she said, ‘I have come here, not to talk about Miss Jeffries, nor any of the people at The

Grange, nor anything at all about the life I led there—not even about my cousin Julia. I have come here to tell you that I have of my own accord shut the door on that old life, and that I want the door to be kept locked. You understand, Lydia. You are never to try to open it; and if you don't, I will stay with you and help you, if you like, with the dressmaking. Only it wouldn't be safe for either of us to stay here. I want you to take me away, Lydia; and to take me away to-day, for I have got to go, and I am willing to go with you. And when we have settled down in some distant place where no one has ever heard of Shirley Kendal, then we will change our name and live there, and you shall have the use of my money. I have got jewels with me which will bring in close on two hundred pounds, and I have over twenty pounds besides in notes and gold. So you see we need not stint ourselves; and I should love to help you with the dressmaking.'

When Shirley began to speak Lydia Kendal's face had gone from red to white, and then from white to red again. At first it darted through her brain that her cousin was mad, but as she listened to her words she could not trace any insanity about them. The little face was very grave, the lips were firm, and the tone resolute. It was a girl who had made up her mind who was speaking. Lydia Kendal knew Shirley of old. She knew that resolute tone; she recognised it for what it was worth. Shirley meant what she was saying; and, oh! oh! oh!

what did Shirley mean? Lydia was poor; Lydia was hard-worked; Lydia was low down—yes, lower down than she had been in her husband's lifetime. She was very low down, and she was going yet lower, and here was Shirley coming to her to build her up again, to give her the good things of life, and to be her friend.

'What! Is it true?' she said when Shirley had ceased speaking. 'Is it absolutely, perfectly true that you mean us—you and me, no less—to live together, to be chummy like we were when you were a little tot, to go away and keep our own counsel, and spend your money? Is it true? Merciful Heaven! you're not joking me, nor twitting me, nor making a fool of me, child?'

'It is true enough,' said Shirley very gravely. 'And I want you to pack at once, for we must go in about an hour. We can begin dressmaking when we have settled down somewhere.'

'Then you have run away from those fine folks?'

'That's it, Lydia.'

'But what about money?'

'I told you we could sell my jewels, and I have got about twenty pounds in cash.'

'But when that goes? It won't last always.'

'I shall get more,' said Shirley in a cold voice. 'I will give you what is necessary. My uncle will never care to see me again; that I am well aware of; but he cannot keep my money from me. I know that also. There will be plenty—plenty to give to you, and for Georgy's education. There will be plenty of money in the dreadful future.'

‘Well, upon my word!’ said Lydia Kendal. ‘And you call it dreadful!’

‘I do, Lydia. I am a very unhappy girl.’

‘Seems to me you’re a right spirited one. And can you really command over two hundred and twenty pounds at the present moment?’

‘I practically can; and we can start dressmaking at once.’

Shirley’s sole hope during all this miserable business was the dressmaking. She was intensely anxious to have something to do, and the dreary idea of making other people’s clothes seemed far better than nothing.

But Lydia at this moment tossed her head in a truly defiant way.

‘Dressmaking, indeed! Catch me bothering myself when I’ve got more money than I know what to do with! My dear child, we won’t need to dressmake when I am your companion, so to speak. But now look here, Shirley. This is the moment to make our plans, for I am willing to take you away, and give up my nice connection here, and my friends, and the schools for Georgy, and all the rest. But I must be paid for it.’

‘Why, of course, Lydia; you shall use what you require of my money.’

‘But you might leave me any day, and then where would Lydia Kendal be? Stranded, like she was before; given a pound here and a pound there, and thankful for sops of that sort. No, no; that’s all very fine, but that don’t suit me now. I have you, as it were, on toast, for I could tell them at The Grange, and they’d pay me well;

for if you want to run away, they don't want you to do it. 'Tain't likely they'd want a great heiress like yourself to leave them. 'Tain't likely at all.'

Shirley sighed very heavily.

'What do you want, Lydia?' she said after a pause.

'Well, I want a hundred pounds down for my own private use when you sell your jewels. That's to begin with. And if we are to live together I want—— But I'll go to a lawyer and tell you that afterwards. I must have it all drawn up clear. I share the fortune. I live with you, but I put by money as well; for you are safe to marry some day, being such a great heiress, and a beauty into the bargain.'

It was just at this moment—just when Shirley felt the plan she was proposing with Lydia Kendal to be almost intolerable—that there came a sharp rat-tat at the front door, and a moment later the small slavey of the establishment entered the room with a telegram which she held gingerly between her finger and thumb.

'The messenger's waiting to see if there's an answer,' said the girl.

'My sakes!' cried Mrs Kendal. 'A wire for me! Now, what does this portend?'

Shirley watched her with latent uneasiness as she opened it. She read it first to herself; then she uttered a cry and thrust it into Shirley's hand.

'I never!' she exclaimed. 'What is to be done now?—You tell that boy he had better wait,

Mary Ann, and I'll send down an answer when it's ready.'

Mary Ann, devoured with curiosity, departed, and Shirley again read the contents of the telegram. The words were short and emphatic. They ran as follows:

'Miss Kendal's friends are in possession of the fact that she has gone to you. Don't attempt to take her from Hillingborough, or act in any way beyond keeping her under your protection, till you hear from them.—MARY TEMPLE.'

Shirley laid the telegram on the table.

'Do you understand this?' said Mrs Kendal. 'Seems to me it's a mighty dangerous thing to have aught to do with you. I'm sure I'm the very last to interfere.'

'Oh Lydia, you won't mind this—you won't!' said Shirley. 'Of course you won't. You couldn't—you couldn't be so cruel. Get your things on. Come, leave everything behind you. You can come back again presently, but take me away now—take me away.'

But, strange to say, Mrs Kendal was obdurate. Take Shirley away she would not. This she declared.

'I have put my foot down, and down it shall stay,' was her exclamation. 'I don't take you; I wouldn't dream of doing so. There'll be that Miss Jeffries after me. And as to the money, I'll never get a farthing of it. I may be within the clutch of the law if I interfere with a naughty girl like yourself. It's back you are to come to The Grange; that's what you are to do. I'll take

you back, and if that don't put me right with the powers that be in that neighbourhood, my name ain't Lydia Kendal.'

Shirley sank down on the nearest chair.

'Lydia,' she said after a pause, 'you must do what you think right. I am tired. I have been up all night travelling until now. Will you get me something to eat? Anything, please, Lydia.'

'I'll send Georgy-Porgy to look after you. You mustn't escape me,' said Mrs Kendal. 'I've a good mind to lock the door.'

'You'd better not do that. Don't be silly. Go now. I can give you a pound or two however things turn out. Be quick and get me some food, Lydia.'

Mrs Kendal called her little boy.

'You come along, Georgy, and look after the pretty lady,' she said.

Georgy came trotting into the room.

'What did you buy with my sixpence?' said Shirley in a cheerful tone. 'What did you get with it?'

Georgy began to explain.

'This horse,' he said, showing a very ugly toy.

Shirley glanced at it.

'There were some prettier ones than that in the shop, weren't there?' she said, fixing her questioning eyes on the child.

'Yes,' he replied, watching her face narrowly—his mother had taught him to secure all that he could—'much, much prettier ones. There was one covered with leather; you wouldn't have known it from a real horse, only it was smaller. I could

have got it for an awfully big price. I had to shut my eyes not to see it when I bought this ugly one for sixpence.'

'How much was the one covered with leather?'

'There's no use in talking,' said Georgy; 'I couldn't get it anyhow. Mother would go wild if I bought a thing like that; and, 'sides, I couldn't get the money.'

'Could you get it for this?' said Shirley, and she put half-a-sovereign into the boy's little palm.

'A gold un!' he cried. 'How much does it stand for?'

'Ten whole shillings,' said Shirley.

'The horse was three-and-six.'

'Then you can get it at once, Georgy. Don't let your mother know. Just slip out of the house, buy the horse, and bring me back the change. Be quick.'

'Oh, won't I just? You're sure you don't mind being left alone?'

'Quite certain—positive. Go, good boy. Give me a kiss before you go.'

The not too clean little lips were raised to Shirley's cheek. She kissed the boy, and he went out of the house.

A moment later she had followed him. There seemed to be wings to her feet. She reached the railway station.

'When does the next train go?' she said to a porter.

'It is due now, miss.'

'Where does it go to?'

'It is due for York, miss, and you are on the right platform. Do you want to go to York?'

‘Yes, of course. Didn’t I ask you when the train was going?’

Shirley’s manner puzzled the man.

‘Will you get me a ticket, please,’ she said—‘third-class to York? Quick—as quick as ever you can!’

The man flew to the booking-office. He came back just as the train steamed into the station. Shirley got in. The carriage was full. Her companions seemed a rough sort; but what matter? She would have nothing to do with first-class passengers now. Poorer people were far more likely to have sympathy with a girl who was in trouble.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE EMPTY BED.



IN the morning of Shirley's departure the inhabitants of The Grange rose as usual. They had not the slightest idea that anything special was pending. They came downstairs as usual and assembled in the breakfast-room. Even Mrs Everett was sufficiently strong to breakfast with the family. It was their custom to have prayers before breakfast, and Mr Cairns read a portion of Scripture and the collects for the day in his calm, matter-of-fact voice. Then the servants dispersed, and the ladies of the family and Mr Cairns assembled in the breakfast-room.

It happened to be a lovely morning, and they were all congratulating themselves on the fact that the weather did at last seem to be settling down to do its duty according to the season of the year.

Mrs Cairns went to the window and threw it wide open, saying, with a smile:

'I shall enjoy life to-day.'

It was not until breakfast was half-over that Shirley was missed. Then some one looked round, and some one else said:

'Where is Shirley?'

'I will run up to her room and find out if she is there,' said Lily, looking with an anxious face from Mrs Cairns to Miss Munro.

'Do, dear; and if she really has a headache, or doesn't seem quite the thing, tell her we will send up her breakfast. Tell her not to hurry, Lily, for Shirley so seldom complains that if there is anything the matter we ought to take it seriously.'

'Who do you say is missing? Who do you say is not well?' cried Mrs Everett, who was a little deaf and had not heard the previous remarks.

'It's only our dear Shirley,' called Mrs Cairns back to her. 'She is so punctual as a rule that we are surprised not to see her here. But Lily will tell us.'

At this moment Lily, with a white face and a very puzzled expression in her wide-open eyes, dashed into the room.

'She is nowhere to be seen; she hasn't slept in her bed all night; and here's this. Oh, do you think there's anything wrong? Oh, I am frightened!'

Lily's words burst out amid a choking sensation in her throat.

Mrs Cairns took up the letter.

'Why, it is addressed to you, dear,' she said to her husband.

Mr Cairns received it, his hand shaking slightly.

'This fuss is absolute nonsense,' he said. 'One would suppose that Shirley had run away.'

'Oh no; that is impossible,' said Julia.

She had not spoken since the commotion had begun. But now her face showed agitation. She suddenly found that she was not at all hungry. She pushed her plate aside and rose impulsively.

‘Father,’ she said, ‘do you mind telling us what is in that letter?’

For Mr Cairns had laid Shirley’s letter beside his plate.

‘I will read it in a few minutes,’ he said.—‘May I trouble you, Charity, to give me another cup of coffee?’

‘How can he?’ thought Julia impatiently.

Miss Munro now rose from the table.

‘If you have quite finished, little girls,’ she said, ‘we had better go upstairs. I want all of us to do a really good morning’s work.’

The words smote on Julia’s ear with mockery. She was watching her father. He had opened the letter, and had spread it before him. Mr Cairns was a man who was always most careful never to show undue emotion, but now a scarlet streak had flown up his cheek and mounted to his forehead. He raised a long, thin hand and pushed back his scanty gray hair; then he raised his eyes and fixed them on his wife; then he looked down again at the letter.

His manner was so peculiar and so unlooked-for that it attracted the attention of every one in the room, in particular of Miss Jeffries, who kept nodding her head and saying to herself:

‘I am not at all frightened. There can’t be anything wrong. Shirley isn’t the sort of girl.

But I wish, all the same, that Stephen did not look so very peculiar.'

At last Mr Cairns had finished the letter. He rose abruptly.

'Father!' said Julia; but he did not take any heed.

'My dearest Stephen, what is wrong?' called his wife.

But he did not reply. He walked out of the breakfast-room, and the next minute they heard him open his study door, enter, and shut and lock the door behind him.

'You had better come to your lessons, girls,' said Miss Munro.

'Lessons!' cried Julia. 'I tell you there's something the matter.'

She felt very frightened as she said the words. Mrs Everett fixed her eyes upon her.

'Come here, Julia Cairns,' she said.

Julia approached the old lady.

'Is there or is there *not* anything the matter?'

'I don't know,' said Julia.

'Where is your cousin Shirley Kendal?'

'I don't know,' said Julia again.

'You don't know! You'll drive me wild with your "don't knows." What is the matter with everybody?—I wish, Charity, you would not allow a poor old lady who is almost deaf, and who has taken a great fancy to a very sweet girl, to be left in the dark.'

'I cannot tell you what is the matter,' said Mrs Cairns. 'I only know that Shirley has not slept in her bed last night, and that she has

written a letter to my husband. I am going to him now to find out what is the matter. I will tell you all in a few minutes.'

'Do,' said Mrs Everett. 'It is true that Shirley Kendal is no relation of mine, but I have a very strong reason for specially liking her. I should like to know the truth as soon as possible. It is very bad—very bad indeed—for old people to be kept long in suspense.'

Her old hand was shaking as though she had the palsy. She took up her knitting and tried to go on with it, but she dropped the stitches, and had to own that her eyes were dim.

Meanwhile Mrs Cairns went to the study door. She knocked. There was no answer. She knocked again. Still no reply. Then she called aloud:

'Stephen dear, it is I—your wife—Charity. Let me in, dear.'

There was a moment's pause; then the watchers in the breakfast-room heard the lock being turned, the door was opened, and they knew that Mrs Cairns had gone in. What tidings was she to receive? What was the matter?

When Mrs Cairns went in she saw Shirley's letter lying wide open on the table. Mr Cairns still had that abstracted, that appalled look on his face.

'Charity,' he said, 'I can't understand; I am bewildered. I suppose I am stunned; I don't know what my own sensations are. I will give you the letter to read, but you ought to be prepared. It is confounding—appalling! In short, I don't believe it.'

‘I had better read it, perhaps, Stephen. You were so fond of her—so very fond’——

‘Fond!’ said Mr Cairns. ‘I was fond of a good girl—not of this Shirley Kendal.’

‘Nonsense, Stephen! she is Shirley Kendal—our own Shirley—whatever she has done.’

‘I never wish to see her again. But read the letter for yourself.’

Mrs Cairns sank into a chair. She took up the letter, which was not written in Shirley’s usual bold and dashing hand; the writing was a little crabbed, and here and there were blots. Perhaps they were caused by the tears of the writer. The contents of the letter were as follows:

‘DEAR UNCLE STEPHEN,—I call you this—I may never call you it again, for I don’t suppose you would wish it—I am going away. You have been all most good to me, but I did not deserve it. You have been most good, and so has Aunt Charity, and so has every one in the house. I felt that you loved me, and your love made me happy, and for a time I had not courage to tell you everything, as I ought to have done. But lately I have seen that dear Julia was not happy, and I have wondered what was best to be done. And we had a talk, and I saw that she considered that I had attracted you all and was making you love me better than her. And then it came over me that I would not like to do Julia a real injury, for I knew that I was not what she thought, nor what any of you thought. You have perhaps imagined—I know

you have—that I am good—very good. But I am not. I was not a bit a good girl in Brazil long ago. It is true I had a hard life, and I was tempted, but you wouldn't like your girl to have anything to do with a girl who lived the life I lived.

‘There is a woman who is a relation of mine. She is quite a common person; her name is Lydia Kendal; she lives at Hillingborough. Miss Jeffries knows about her, for I told Miss Jeffries. And this woman knows about my life when I was a little girl. Do you know that once I was taken before the magistrates and accused of stealing a watch? The story was that I had gone into the shop and taken the watch from the counter, and sold it to get money. It was proved against me, and they said that they could put me into prison. I was only a little child, but that really did happen. I shall never forget it, nor the looks on the people's faces, nor the angry man who accused me of stealing the watch. Father was ill at the time when I was said to have stolen it, but he was well when the trial came, and he said something to the magistrate, and the magistrate let me off; but we had to leave the town. You see what a great escape I had; and I was branded as a thief—yes, it is quite true. You didn't know, and I didn't like to tell you. I wasn't awfully sorry, either; for, you see, I wasn't brought up as Julia was, nor as Lily was, nor as any of the sort of girls you know. I was in reality—I am in reality—a wild girl of the West; and I

have the wildness still in my nature, and I am not fit to have anything more to do with you, and in especial anything to do with Julia. You haven't loved dear Julia as much as you ought while I have been with you. I know you have not; and it has hurt her dreadfully. But now you will love her again, for I shall not be with you to make you turn your thoughts to me. I thank you very, very much for all you have done, and for the happy months I have spent with you; and if it weren't for Julia, who has been suffering so sadly, I might never have told you. I might have gone on being happy, for although I was had up before the magistrate, and but for father I would have been sent to a sort of reformatory, I was very young at the time, and very much neglected, and I don't feel that I could do anything of that sort now; but of course there is no saying. The fact remains, however, that I had a bad time in the past, and I can never be your own little Shirley. There is no such Shirley Kendal as you have imagined. There is no girl with a pure and beautiful and steadfast heart. There is just a broken-down Shirley, although she loves you very dearly.

'Don't be a bit anxious about me, any of you, for I am going to take care of myself. I have enough money for the present. In a few months, when you have got over this and can feel quite calmly about me, I will write to you. And then perhaps you can arrange how I am to receive my money, for there is no sense in giving that

up; it wouldn't do any one else any good, and I must live somehow.—Your unhappy and affectionate niece,
SHIRLEY KENDAL'

'It is true, you see,' said Mr Cairns when his wife had finished reading the letter. 'It is appalling. The girl's conscience has been working, and she could stand it no longer.'

'I don't believe it, somehow,' said Mrs Cairns.

'You don't believe it, my dear?'

'No, I don't believe it. I don't see it, somehow. Shirley couldn't do that sort of thing.'

'But, Charity, she says so herself; she confesses it. The girl's conscience has been reproaching her. I am glad of that at least. I could not have kept her here after that letter. I suppose we ought to tell the others; it is only fair. I feel,' continued Mr Cairns, 'as though I had lost Shirley. It seems to me as though she were dead. She is quite right in what she says in her letter: there never was a Shirley as we imagined her.'

'Oh yes,' said his wife, 'there was!'

'Charity, you amaze me! A thief! A girl who could steal a watch from a shop, who was brought up before the magistrates, who would have been put into a reformatory but for her father's influence! Oh, my dear! And my sister's child, too. This is intolerable. It is a shock to my pride. This is a blow indeed.'

'Poor, poor little girl!' said Mrs Cairns.

She was thinking of Shirley's sweet eyes, and Shirley's smile, and Shirley's caressing hand and

touch. She could not imagine the naughty girl that Mr Cairns was conjuring up.

He rose presently to his feet.

‘I suppose we must tell the others,’ he said again; ‘and I suppose the sooner we do it the better. Let us call them all in.’

He crossed the room, opened the door, and shouted to Julia. She came running forward. Her face was pale, and she had a very strange feeling in her heart. She did not know whether she was glad or sorry. She only knew that she was wild with fear and agitated beyond measure.

‘Julia,’ said her father, ‘Shirley has written a letter which I consider it my duty to speak to you all about. Will you all—you and Lily, and Miss Munro, and your aunt Hannah, and, if she likes, Mrs Everett—come in here? You are all interested in Shirley, so you ought to know. Come at once.’

Mr Cairns turned and went back to the library. Presently the little party, who had been so gay and bright half-an-hour before, joined him. Mrs Everett came up close to Mrs Cairns, and Mrs Cairns took her hand. Mr Cairns stood up and glanced round him.

‘I wish to tell you,’ he said, ‘that a very, very sad thing has happened—in my opinion a most dreadful thing.’

‘Is Shirley Kendal alive, may I ask?’ was Mrs Everett’s remark at that moment.

‘Yes, she is certainly alive. There is nothing to be anxious about—at least, I hope not.’

Mr Cairns’s voice faltered for a moment; for

Shirley, whatever her sins in the past, was not grown up, and she was a very lovely girl. She was alone somewhere. Was she in reality safe? He thought of his sister, whose eyes resembled Shirley's; but he shut away the memory, for he was deeply hurt and deeply shocked.

'I have had a letter from Shirley,' he said. 'It concerns all those who knew her. She has told me a story about her past which alters the entire position.'

'Indeed!' said Miss Jeffries then. 'I should uncommonly like to hear it. I judge from your tone, Stephen, that you are annoyed and shocked about something. Now, I pride myself on being a very keen observer of character, and I would gladly challenge all the world to prove that Shirley Kendal is the sort of girl who could do a low or disgraceful thing.'

'Well,' said Mr Cairns, 'I am sorry to have to tell you the news which has reached me; but the fact is, the unhappy girl herself has told me—she has confessed.'

'Very plucky of her if she has done anything wrong; though, of course, I don't for one moment believe it,' said Mrs Everett.

She had drawn her chair close to Mr Cairns, and was hanging on his words.

'Out with it, sir!' she said. 'Suspense is very bad for the aged.'

'The story is this,' said Mr Cairns: 'Shirley, when a very young girl, stole a watch.'

Julia pricked up her ears. Her heart beat, and now indeed there was a strange feeling in it.

She looked around her—just a momentary look of triumph. But she did not give another such glance, for at the first look in her eyes Mrs Everett managed to meet them with her own; and her eyes flashed something into Julia's which made the girl quiver and shrink into herself.

'Go on,' said Miss Jeffries, 'with your most amazing statement.'

'As a child she stole a watch from a shop in Rio. She does not deny it. She gives no explanatory circumstances. She simply states that she did it—that she sold the watch and got some money for it. The theft was discovered, and she was had up before the magistrates. She would have been put into a prison school but for her father's interference. She does not even say she was sorry. On the contrary, she says she did not feel any sorrow. But her conscience seems to have awakened, for she suddenly perceived that a girl who is no better than a common thief is not a fit companion for my Julia. Nor is she a fit companion,' continued Mr Cairns. 'I loved—not the girl who wrote that letter, but one of my own imagination. She shall not live here; I cast her out of my life. I will be just to her, and she shall have her money, but some one else must look after her in the future.'

'Then let me be that person,' said Miss Jeffries, 'for I love her whatever she has done. Only I beg to state she did not steal the watch.'

'Shake hands, will you, Miss Jeffries?' said old Mrs Everett at that moment. 'You and I are of



'Then let me be that person,' said Miss Jeffries, 'for I love her
whatever she has done.'

the same opinion. The girl who came to me yesterday, and—oh! but I mustn't betray her—a girl who spoke as she has done, possesses the noblest and worthiest of hearts. You will be sorry some day for your cruel words, Stephen Cairns.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE EXPRESS TRAIN.



It was about an hour and a half later when Miss Jeffries came into the library with her bonnet and cloak on. She was drawing her gloves over her hands. Her manner was full of decision and promptitude. Mr Cairns, his wife, and Julia were all present. Julia had been crying very bitterly. She did not know herself the true fountain of those tears. She imagined that she was glad, but in her heart she was anxious and terrified. The beginning of a lifelong remorse was seizing her.

Julia stood near her father, whose arm was flung round her waist. He had kissed her often during that hour and a half, and had begged of her to forgive him.

‘I was blinded,’ he kept saying. ‘The beauty and the sweetness of the girl deceived me. But she is nothing compared to you—nothing compared to you—my own dear, good, innocent child.’

‘Yes, Julia dear,’ said her mother, ‘we all loved Shirley, but I am beginning to agree with your father now. She was not the girl we pictured her.’

‘I knew about this story for some time,’ said Julia in a whisper; and it was at this juncture that Miss Jeffries entered the room.

‘I am going,’ she said, ‘to take dear Mrs Everett home. She says she wishes to go home, as people who could entertain such sentiments with regard to Shirley Kendal can no longer be congenial friends of hers. Having seen her safely to her own house, I shall go and have an interview with Lydia Kendal. You are rather astonished, my dear Stephen, that I professed my absolute disbelief in Shirley’s statement. The statement itself may be correct, but we do not know the circumstances. Circumstances alter matters. Environment lends colour. I want to see this crime, if crime it be, in the midst of Shirley’s environment at the date of the crime; then I shall be able to judge how severely she ought to be punished.’

‘It is her own statement, you know, Hannah,’ said Mrs Cairns; ‘we cannot go beyond that. It is her own confession, poor child!’

‘And I knew it beforehand,’ began Julia. But nobody heeded her; the moment was too intense.

‘Good-bye,’ said Miss Jeffries. ‘I shall let you know if I have anything to tell. In the meantime I have ordered the carriage, and we must be off or we shall miss our train.’

Miss Jeffries left the room. She and Mrs Everett drove to the railway station; from thence they took train to Hillingborough, and soon after two o’clock that day Mrs Everett was once more in her own house. She and Miss Jeffries kissed at parting, and then Miss Jeffries took a cab to Lydia Kendal’s dwelling.

Lydia Kendal had spent a most distressful morning. When she discovered, on her return to the drawing-

room with the meal she had hastily prepared for Shirley, that the young lady had flown, her dismay and agitation were very great. She did not know what to do, and vented her feelings by severely punishing Georgy-Porgy, who had come in from the shop laden not only with his skin-covered horse, but also with different bags of sweetmeats and cakes. His mother instantly ordered him to solitude in his own chamber. He was not altogether unhappy there, however, for he took his horse and sweetmeats with him.

Mrs Kendal was pacing up and down the room when Miss Jeffries appeared. Her eyes were wild, her hair untidy.

‘What a fool—what a fool I am!’ she said to herself. ‘I have missed my chance.’

When Miss Jeffries entered she ran towards her.

‘It’s not my fault,’ she said. ‘I know, of course, why you have come. When she came to me I meant to keep her. I only went downstairs to get some cocoa and bread-and-butter for her, for she looked so tired and hungry. I never saw Shirley look so hungry before. I put Georgy-Porgy to look after her, but she sent him out, poor child! When I returned I meant to take her back to The Grange—I did indeed. I do hope you won’t blame me. It is a terrible blow to me, her vanishing like this.’

‘Where has she gone?’ said Miss Jeffries.

‘Ah! that I don’t know. I presume somewhere by train. I went to the railway station and questioned the porters. One porter said that a girl answering to Shirley’s description had taken train

to York. I don't know what we are to do. She may not go so far; she may leave the train before it reaches York. She is very clever, and has been about the world a great deal. Oh, what am I to do? I do trust, Miss Jeffries, you won't blame me. Since you and Shirley visited me that day, I have been so careful. I wouldn't do anything to injure her for the world. I can't imagine what is wrong. The poor child seemed terribly upset.'

'I have come here,' said Miss Jeffries, 'to have a talk with you. The fact is this: you know all about Shirley's past life.'

'Not quite all, but a good deal. She was a strange child.'

'She is only strange now in being a little nicer than most girls, and a little more attractive, and a little more amiable,' said Miss Jeffries.

'Perhaps so. She was always taking, even as a little child.'

'I have come here to find out the truth,' repeated Miss Jeffries. 'She says you know all about it; it happened when she lived with you.'

'What does she allude to?' asked Mrs Kendal, turning pale.

'She wrote a very extraordinary letter to her uncle. I must give you some of the contents of the letter. She accused herself of being no less than a common thief.'

Georgy-Porgy began pounding with his feet on the floor overhead. Mrs Kendal sank into a chair.

'A common thief!' she repeated.

'Yes, poor, unhappy child! she said so. She said that when she was very young and lived in

Brazil she stole a watch out of a shop. She had to appear before the magistrate, and was convicted. She would have been severely punished but for her father's interference. You know about that, do you not?'

'Oh yes, I know about that.'

'The fact that you knew gave you a hold over Shirley.'

'It could have given me a hold, certainly; but then, I didn't want to use it against her.'

'You are certain you never repeated that story to any one?'

Mrs Kendal shuffled with her feet; then she looked up and said in a frightened voice:

'I told Julia Cairns.'

'You told my niece Julia Cairns—eh? Did Julia tell anybody else?'

'I—don't know.'

'Why did you tell Julia Cairns?'

'She—paid me. I am very poor; you mustn't be hard on me. I wanted money so badly, and Shirley wouldn't give me any more.'

'Brave Shirley, say I. Well now, Mrs Kendal, I want to get from you the particulars with regard to this statement. In the first place, how old was Shirley?'

'Oh, quite young; only eleven years old.'

'A child. I will not pretend that she was irresponsible,' was Miss Jeffries' comment. 'Will you now relate all the incidents with regard to the day that Shirley stole the watch? I want to clear the girl, to whom I am attached, and if you can help me I will make it worth your while. I

don't pretend that I am doing the highest deed in offering you money, but I do want to see the circumstances clearly.'

Mrs Kendal went to the window. She looked out for a moment; then she turned round again. There were two stories she could tell—two. Which would bring her in the greatest amount of gold? Suddenly and swiftly she made up her mind.

'How much will you give me,' she said, 'if I absolutely and completely clear and exonerate Shirley Kendal?'

'Exonerate her first. I will tell you afterwards.'

There was a noise in the street. Some boys were heard shouting:

'Terrible accident two miles outside Hillingborough! Express train,' &c.

Mrs Kendal heard the words in a dim sort of way. Miss Jeffries did not hear them at all. Mrs Kendal shut down the window and then turned to Miss Jeffries.

'I could clear her,' she said in a low voice.

'Absolutely?'

'Quite absolutely. I want fifty pounds first.'

The sound of the boys' crying came nearer and yet nearer:

'Terrible accident two miles outside Hillingborough! Express train runs into a local! Passengers killed—many injured!'

Miss Jeffries then started up. Her face turned white. She ran to the window, opened it, and thrust out her head.

'Have you a paper there?' she said. 'What are you crying out?'

One of the boys stopped and showed her an evening edition of a small local paper. She ran downstairs herself to fetch it, and brought it up. There was a small paragraph which she read with whitening lips and straining eyes. Then she turned to Mrs Kendal.

‘Where did you say Shirley was going?’

‘To York; they said so.’

‘Then, my God! I must follow her. Stay here if you like; I have no time now to listen to your story.’

‘What is it?’ said Mrs Kendal. ‘Tell me—tell me quickly what is wrong. Oh, my God! is she one of the victims? Tell me at once.’

‘You can read for yourself.’

Miss Jeffries flung the paper on the table. She had gone as far as the door when Mrs Kendal rushed after her. She flung herself on her knees and wound her arms round Miss Jeffries’ waist.

‘If she is dead she is dead,’ she said; ‘and if she is only injured a minute cannot matter. You must—you shall hear the truth—the truth! I don’t want fifty pounds now. I will tell you. Oh, I am frightened! Oh, my God! my God! what agony is this?’

Miss Jeffries looked down on her.

‘Listen,’ continued Mrs Kendal. ‘I don’t know why Shirley told that story; I can’t imagine why she told it, for it wasn’t true.’

‘I thought as much. But be quick.’

‘She never stole the watch. She never went into the shop for the purpose. It’s true she went into the shop to buy a key for her father’s watch. Her

father was ill at the time—very ill—and near death's door. He was starving. They were almost without any funds. The child was lovely—far more beautiful than most others. Her magnificent hair was in itself a glory. What she really did was this: she sold her hair. She went to a barber, and he gave her some pounds for it. I think she got seven pounds. She came home shorn of her lovely locks, and with the money in her pocket. And she never told what she had done, and her father was at the time too ill to notice. He admired her hair; he loved it; it was a sort of idol to him. Well, it was I who stole the watch. I entered the shop about the same time as she did. I took it from the counter and slipped it into her pocket. And when she changed her dress I took it out and sold it. But some one said she had been *seen* with the watch in her pocket. Anyhow, she never told; she kept her own counsel. But one day she said to me, with a strange look in her eyes:

“You know that I never stole the watch. You know it quite well. But I disobeyed father when I had my hair cut off, and I'll let him think what he likes.”

‘Poor little soul! she was never like others. Don't say for a moment that anything bad has happened.’

Miss Jeffries' face was perfectly rigid when this recital was finished. She left the house without a single word.

After she was gone Mrs Kendal flung herself on the floor in an agony of remorse and terror.

‘There never was any one like Shirley. If she dies I shall never hold up my head again.’

Miss Jeffries was pre-eminently a woman of action. Shirley might not be amongst the dead, but at least she must be found. She must be comforted; she must be helped, noble, impulsive, chivalrous child. The true meaning of that letter was beyond Miss Jeffries’ power to fathom, but at least she understood Shirley herself. The first thing she did was to go to the telegraph office. From there she despatched a message to Mr Cairns at The Grange:

‘Shirley is absolutely cleared. Will explain when we meet. Don’t be frightened. Accident to train at Finch Junction. Am going there. Have reason to believe that Shirley is amongst the passengers.’

Having despatched this telegram, Miss Jeffries took a carriage and drove the two miles which separated Hillingborough from the junction where the accident to the express had taken place.

Meanwhile a telegram from Mrs Temple to Mr Cairns had aroused a great deal of attention at The Grange. The little party was very small and very sad. Lily had gone quite away by herself. She wanted to telegraph to her mother and ask to be allowed to go home. She could not stand the house any longer. With Shirley away it was intolerably dull. Lily, too, never doubted Shirley.

‘There must be something the matter—something dreadful the matter—and it is all mixed up with Julia,’ she said to herself. ‘Julia is the one who could tell; she is the only one who could clear Shirley.’

While Lily was out Mrs Temple's telegram arrived, causing some agitation. But Mr Cairns was stern, almost immovable. He believed in the letter. He did not think that any girl would willingly accuse herself.

'There!' he said to his wife. 'She has been to London, and is now going to Hillingborough to that disgraceful relation of hers, Lydia Kendal. Hannah will probably find her there on her arrival. I do trust that Hannah will not be indiscreet. A girl of that sort ought to be punished. She had no right to come here with such a guilty past.'

'Oh father!' said Julia then—and she raised her eyes with a dim light in them—'don't be too hard on her.'

'It is very good of you, Julia, to be inclined to be lenient to your cousin,' said her father. 'I often wondered why there was such a sad change in you, my love, but at last I understand.'

'No, you don't. I am the worst girl on earth,' thought Julia.

Her feelings of penitence, perhaps rather of remorse, were growing and growing. She went out of the room. She put on her hat and strolled into the garden.

Yes, it was a summer's day, and Shirley was gone. No longer would Shirley make her miserable. No longer would that gay voice, and pleasant laugh, and sweet, sweet smile haunt the glades and gardens of The Grange. Shirley was away. Pretty Shirley—bright, fascinating, charming! She had been a thorn in Julia's side, and now Julia might be happy. People would be attracted by

her when they came to visit The Grange. People would listen to her when she spoke; they would comment on her music, on her accomplishments. She would be herself once more. Ah! but would she ever be really herself again? Could she ever forget?

There had been a look in Shirley's eyes when she clasped Julia in her arms two nights ago which Julia could not forget. It was a look of self-abnegation—the look which the saints (she had often seen pictures of saints) might have worn.

Julia gave a harsh laugh. To compare Shirley, a little common thief, with the saints—why, the idea was sacrilege!

She was pacing up and down her favourite walk when she caught sight of Lily in the distance. Lily was coming very sadly towards her. Lily's eyes were almost blotted out of her head with tears.

'What is it, Lily?' said Julia.

'I want to go away, please, Julia,' said Lily. 'I want to write a letter to mother to tell her I am going home. It will be best for you too,' continued the little girl in a sad tone. 'You don't want companions. You will be glad to be alone again.'

'I shall be very glad to resume my own old life,' was Julia's answer.

At that moment Mops rushed up to Julia. He yapped and caught hold of her frock, and looked at her with a frightened look in his eyes.

'Oh darling, come to me!' said Lily.—'Oh Julia, can you bear it? Her own dear little dog!'

Lily caught Mops in a fierce embrace, and once more her tears broke forth.

‘Oh! I love her,’ she said—‘I love her dreadfully.’

‘You oughtn’t to,’ said Julia. ‘Even father, who was so fond of her, doesn’t care for her now.’

‘It seems to me I can’t undo love,’ said Lily, ‘even if the person we love has done wrong. But then, somehow, Julia, I don’t believe it.’

‘That’s silly. But then you are all silly about Shirley. She has told us herself. She wrote it in the letter. We ought all to believe it.’

‘Well, somehow I don’t—I can’t. Oh dear! oh dear! I am a very unhappy girl.’

She turned away, and Julia did not try to detain her.

‘I suppose there is something the matter with me,’ Julia said to herself. ‘I certainly feel rather funny—not comfortable, as I thought I should. I miss Shirley. Of course I’ll get over that. She isn’t really to be pitied—a girl who could do that sort of thing. And then, of course, I knew it for a long time, and I meant to tell—yes, I meant to tell. I didn’t think she’d tell. I suppose it was rather noble of her to put herself, as it were, out of court—to take away her last chance; and if she is a common thief, I must admit that she is affectionate. She did love us all—even me. She was very sweet that night she slept with me. I am just, whatever my faults are. She had her charm, no doubt of it.’

Just then a telegraph-boy was seen cycling down the avenue.

‘What!’ said Julia to herself; ‘more telegrams! I suppose this is from Aunt Hannah. She is sure to have met Shirley at Mrs Kendal’s. I do trust Mrs Kendal will not have mentioned that she told me that story. It would not look well my keeping it to myself.’

Julia went up to the telegraph-boy.

‘If you have a telegram,’ she said, ‘I will take it to the house, and you can wait in the porch for the answer.’

The boy produced the telegram from his pocket. Julia ran into the house with it.

‘It is for you, father,’ she said.

Mr Cairns opened it and read. His face changed. ‘God be merciful!’ was his exclamation.

‘Oh, what is it, father?’

‘Child, this pierces. There is something very terrible. I must go to Hillingborough immediately. Oh Julia!’

‘Father, father, you terrify me!’

‘There has been an accident. You must break it to your mother. Poor, poor Shirley! Oh! she may not have been killed, but they think she was in the train. I must go at once.’

The little flimsy sheet of paper floated down to Julia’s feet. Mr Cairns turned and left the room. Julia stood still. It was as though the earth itself had opened and she knew that if she took one step—even one half-step—forward she would be swallowed up. It was that and it was more. It was as though heaven itself had also

opened and she saw the face of an angry God, and she knew herself for what she was.

Oh for the voice of Shirley singing in the garden! Oh for the past—the past of only a week ago! But the past could never return, and that voice might never be heard again.

Julia heard some one approaching. The numbed feeling which had encompassed her lifted, and she rushed out of the room. Mrs Cairns was standing in the hall.

‘Your father has ordered the carriage. Oh, my poor little Shirley! I am going with him,’ said her mother. ‘Oh, my poor child—my poor darling! We must pray, Julia—we must pray that our dear Shirley is not seriously hurt. How fearful this is!’

‘I am going with you, mother—I must!’

‘No, dear; your father would not wish it.’

‘I must,’ said Julia—‘I must see her. I will go. You can’t keep me; I must go.’

‘Julia, my poor child, this is too much for you. —Stephen dear, Julia is terribly upset. She has such a feeling heart. Oh, the poor child!’

‘I want to go with you, father, and with mother. And I haven’t a feeling heart; I have a black one. I know why she did it. I know why she went away. It was all my fault. Oh, I am the worst girl on earth! You must take me, father; if you don’t I shall go mad!’

Julia uttered a high scream. The wheels of the carriage which had been so hastily ordered crunched the gravel outside. Julia looked from father to mother.

‘I have my hat and coat on,’ she said. ‘I tell you that I will go. I alone am to blame. I will explain to you as we go. Go I must!’

‘Come, then, Julia,’ said her father in a very grave voice, and he led her towards the carriage.

CHAPTER XXX.

REPENTANCE AND LOVE.



WHEN they found her—and they all did find her that day—first Aunt Hannah, and then Mr and Mrs Cairns and Julia—the saint look was more marked than ever on Shirley's face. She was not dead, but she was injured. Her back was hurt, and the doctors, who had examined her carefully, could not yet pronounce an opinion on her case. She was too ill to be moved, and she lay with several other wounded and terribly injured people in a hastily improvised shed. She looked very patient, she who had been so animated, so bright, so gay. She who had been the soul of movement and grace could not now lift a finger, and could only speak in a low tone. The doctor said she was not only hurt in her back, but stunned. A great many people had been killed in this terrible accident, for some of the carriages had been telescoped and absolutely reduced to splinters; and had not Shirley providentially travelled third-class she must have been amongst the killed. As it was she lived, but that was all the doctors could say at present. Other doctors were sent for, first from Hillingborough, and then from a larger town twenty

miles away. There was nothing Mr and Mrs Cairns would not do for Shirley.

Aunt Hannah established herself as Shirley's nurse, and no better nurse could be found in the length and breadth of England. She forbade Julia to go to her cousin, and perhaps this was at the present moment Julia's most severe punishment.

'It was my fault,' she said, taking Aunt Hannah's hand and looking from her to her father and mother. 'I was mad with jealousy just because you all loved her so much, and I let my feelings get worse and worse. Oh! I'd give anything in the wide world just to speak to her once more and ask her to forgive me. I did it—oh yes, I did it!'

Julia no longer in the least minded confessing her fault. She told everything from the beginning: how her feelings of dislike to Shirley grew greater and greater; how they seemed to dominate her until she could only look at her cousin with that cloud of envy and malice coming between them. She acknowledged that she was so prejudiced that everything Shirley did appeared to her crooked and full of fault. Then came the unexpected visit of Lydia Kendal, and the chance of putting Shirley in the wrong. There came also that terrible episode of the letter which had been written to her father—the letter which Julia had suppressed. She described how she had buried it in the garden at Mrs Everett's, and how Mrs Everett had found it and had threatened to tell that she possessed it; and then, in some marvellous way, she did not tell, and Shirley seemed to be

mixed up in that. Julia told how Shirley had discovered that her cousin was unhappy, and had offered to go at the end of her year. But when this did not satisfy Julia she decided to go at once.

‘She did not tell me about that,’ said Julia. ‘She only said that she would help me; and although I hated her, she said she would sleep with me that miserable, miserable night. And oh! she did; and her charm and her nobleness comforted me; and notwithstanding my hatred I knew there was no one like her, and I knew she could not do a mean or cowardly thing, although I wished to believe she had done it. Then she went—she went—the only way she could, writing to you, father, and telling you what she was accused of. If you will read the letter again, father, you will see that she never said she had done it, only that she was accused of it, and was had up before the magistrate, and but for her father would have been punished. I noticed it at the time, but you did not notice it; no one would who was not behind the scenes. Yes, that was Shirley. I suppose she had her faults, and it was wrong to run away, but there is no one like her. If she dies I shall never hold up my head again; it will kill me.’

‘Now, Julia,’ said Miss Jeffries, ‘you have told everything; and having told, there is hope for you. God in His mercy will forgive you. There is no doubt that He will forgive you, for He forgives all who truly turn to Him, and who truly repent of their many sins. But although He may

forgive, He may punish, and punish in a very terrible way. That I cannot tell. What you have got to do now, Julia, is to forget yourself, and to think of the girl who is lying at death's door, and do your little best to help your father and mother. This is a terrible hour. Ask God to help you, Julia, for no one else can.'

'But may I go to her—may I see her?'

'You may not go to her nor see her at present.'

'I shall die—I shall die if she doesn't forgive me—if she doesn't say with her own lips that she forgives me.'

'That is a selfish way of talking, Julia. Even if you are unhappy, would you injure her now? Think of others, my child.'

Julia turned away. The whole world was black and dreary.

There was a small inn near, where they were to put up for the night; no one thought of going from the seat of the accident. Mrs Cairns, finding that she was not allowed to visit Shirley, devoted herself to the other wounded passengers. By-and-by she asked Julia to help her. This was the kindest thing she could do; and while the unhappy child was fetching water, and standing by the hastily improvised stretchers on which the injured people were lying, she did not feel her woes quite so keenly.

But it was in her little bed that night—the hard little bed on which she lay in a tiny attic at the roof—that she really thought of Shirley, and really faced all that terrible cloud of jealousy and anger which had so long shut away the

sunshine of God's love from her heart; and it was in the morning that a gentler and a softer and altogether a different Julia awakened. Face to face with what she had done, she saw her past life as it was, and her penitent and passionate prayers seemed to be answered. She was calmer, and, above all things, she tried to forget herself.

When she came downstairs and went and stood outside in the porch of the musty, fusty little house, the first thing she saw was a carriage drawn by a pair of horses standing just outside the 'Sign of the Three Bears.' There was something about the carriage that seemed familiar. She went up to it, and saw a white-faced old lady seated within. The old lady beckoned to her, and then with some difficulty dropped down the window and put her head out.

'I know everything, Julia. I know just what you have done, and I couldn't rest until I came. The question is, not what you have done, but how Shirley is. We have got to save her. She is the sweetest creature that has visited this earth for many a long day, and if we can help it, and God in His mercy permits it, she must not leave the world. I telegraphed to London last night for Sir Wilfred Cumberley, and I don't suppose a better surgeon is to be found in the length and breadth of England. He is examining Shirley now, and if he pronounces it possible, we shall have her conveyed in a specially constructed carriage back to Hillingborough to my house to be nursed. He is with her now, and we shall soon know the best or the worst.'

'The worst? Oh, can there be any worst?' cried Julia.

'Indeed, child, her life hangs on a thread; but we shall soon know. Give me your hand, Julia. You are suffering?'

'Yes,' said Julia.

'I see it in your face. Your eyes have been opened?'

'Yes,' said Julia again.

'I wish you could have seen that poor young creature when she pleaded for you the day before she left. Had I really guessed what was working in her mind I would never have granted her request. But I could not guess, and the child seemed so broken down, and so impatient that I should yield to her, that I did—I did.'

Julia pressed a little nearer to the carriage.

'If she dies I shall die,' she answered in a low voice.

'No, you won't, Julia; you will live, for God is the only One who can order the hour and time of our going. But there is a bustle and the doctor is coming out. Leave me for a minute, child, and I will speak with him.'

Julia rushed away. There was a young larch-wood near by, and the trees were covered with their first glory of spring green. Julia rushed into it. She threw herself on the ground, and remained motionless for a long time.

It was really an hour or two before Julia returned, and when she did the aspect of everything was changed, for Sir Wilfred Cumberley had given a most favourable verdict with regard

to Shirley. She had been badly hurt, but not fatally. His trust was that she would be as well as ever, although for a long time she would have to lie on her back, as the nerves of the spine were seriously jarred. There was no reason why she should not be moved to Hillingborough, and the sooner this was accomplished the better would be her chance of ultimate and complete recovery.

Where money is no object difficulties can be overcome, and that very day Shirley was taken back to the town from which she had fled in such complete distress and mistaken self-abnegation. Mrs Everett insisted on the young girl being nursed in her house, and there she stayed during the greater part of the summer.

It was autumn when she returned once more to The Grange. She was still very weak, and had lost her brilliant colour and some of the fire from her bright eyes. But her laugh was as gay as ever, and her spirit unbroken.

It was Julia herself who went to meet her when she came back to The Grange.

‘You are my sister, Julia—my own darling sister,’ said Shirley—‘and I love you with all my heart.’

‘And I,’ said Julia—‘oh, Shirley, I have no words!’

And then she flung her arms round Shirley, buried her face against the soft young cheek, and shed tears of repentance and love.

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